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[Messrs. Debenham & Gould.

THOMAS J. COMBER.

THOMAS J. COMBER

Missionary Pioneer to the Congo

BY

JOHN BROWN MYERS

(ASSOCIATION SECRETARY BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY)

AUTHOR OF "WILLIAM CAREY, THE SHOEMAKER WHO BECAME THE 'FATHER
AND FOUNDER OF MODERN MISSIONS.'"

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PREFACE.



THE name of Thomas Comber is widely known amongst the friends of Christian Missions to the heathen. Many of those who knew him personally have intimated their desire for a memorial record of his life and labours. There are, however, more general considerations which make such a record appropriate. Mr. Comber was one of two—Mr. Grenfell being the other—who were the first missionary pioneers to enter Congo country. From that entrance until his death, he was the acknowledged leader of the Mission he thus helped to originate. And when the “Dark Continent” shall be no longer dark, but shall have become “light in the Lord,” it may be that African Christians will gratefully recount his services on behalf of their land, and “glorify God in him.”

It will be remembered that the character of this volume necessarily excludes any general reference to the various societies having missionary operations in Africa; and, indeed, does not even admit of more

than a passing allusion, it may be, to some of those associated with Mr. Comber, and who, with a like-minded consecration, served the Divine Master.

Amongst his many gifts Mr. Comber had special skill in epistolary composition. He wrote many letters, and knew well how to write them. Nearly all of those inserted have hitherto been unpublished.

The writer begs to acknowledge his indebtedness especially to Mr. Comber's father, his brother Percy, Mr. Rickards, Mrs. Hartland, Mr. Parkinson, the Revs. H. Wright and D. Gracey, Mr. R. Hodder, and Mrs. Stanford, without whose assistance the memoir could not have been written. The records of the Baptist Missionary Society have also been of invaluable service.

It is possible that some will lay down this volume sad at heart on account of the trials and calamities the Congo Mission has involved, but it is believed that none familiar with the origin of particular missions will be disposed to regard the losses sustained as purposeless waste; rather will they confidently anticipate, as being in the Divine order, abundant fruitfulness from such self-sacrificing, martyr devotion.

J. B. M.





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THOMAS J. COMBER.

CHAPTER I.

HIS BOYHOOD.

IT was on the 7th of November, 1852, in Clarendon Street, Camberwell, that Thomas James Comber was born. His father was by trade a manufacturing jeweller. Mr. Comber's family consisted of five children—Carrie being the eldest; Tom, as he was usually called, the second; the third died in infancy; the remaining two being Sidney and Percy.

In the vicinity of Clarendon Street is Denmark Place, where the Baptist Chapel is situated, which, at the time of Tom Comber's birth, was the scene of Dr. Steane's ministry; and which, in later years, was to acquire further denominational interest through the labours of Dr. Stanford. Of the church meeting in this honoured sanctuary, Mr. and Mrs. Comber were members. The Sunday school in connection with Denmark Place Chapel was held in Crawford Street. When Tom was three years old, his parents removed into this street, to reside in a house next

door but one to the building in which the school met. The father becoming a teacher, took the child with him to the infant class, which at that time was conducted by Miss Annie Harwood, now Mrs. Holmden, widely known as the translator of Dr. Pressense's valuable works. It is not easy to determine how early in life, and to what extent, a child may be benefited by the influence of his teacher; but we may quite believe it was to the decided advantage of little Tom to be brought, at this tender age, under the religious training of so gifted and devoted a lady. We may here observe that the like advantage was also enjoyed by his sister and two brothers, all four of whom—surely a most remarkable if not unique fact in family life—were hereafter to become missionaries to the heathen.

Tom was equally fortunate in the influence brought to bear upon him in the British School, held in the same building in Crawford Street; for the schoolmaster, Mr. Holmes, was a man of high character, as well as a teacher of more than ordinary ability. As a schoolboy, Tom displayed commendable diligence, as may be gathered from the circumstance that, every morning at eight o'clock, his home lessons would invariably be presented to one or other of his parents for inspection, and this with "pleasure more than pressure."

The necessities of Mr. Comber's business did not, however, permit his son to pursue his school studies under Mr. Holmes's tuition beyond the age of twelve. At that early period in life the boy was required to enter his father's workshop, but a thirst for learning had already been excited, which led him eagerly to avail himself of every opportunity for the improvement of his mind. In this respect he was much stimulated and encouraged by Mr. Reginald Hodder, who, soon after his promotion from Miss Harwood's class, became his Sunday-school teacher; which relationship existed greatly to Tom's benefit, for six

years, until, indeed, he had reached the age of fourteen. His teacher speaks of him "as a bright and lovable lad." Mr. Hodder strengthened the attachment between himself and his boys by encouraging athletic exercises, thus wisely recognising Nature's demands for healthy recreation. Often the teacher and his class would meet in the Addington Square baths or on the cricket field. "While I had my class at Camberwell," says Mr. Hodder, "I taught most of the boys to swim. Tom, who was a very nervous boy, was, however, the first to swim across the baths. In my last conversation with him he mentioned this to me, and said how valuable this knowledge had been to him when upon the Congo."

About this time, when eleven years old, Tom competed with his fellow-scholars for a prize offered for the best composed essay, in which competition he proved successful, the awarder of the prize, Mr. Edwin Hodder, expressing his opinion that the writer gave evidence of becoming one day either a teacher or preacher. The feelings of cordiality which sprang up between teacher and scholar remained in after years. On his first return from Africa Mr. Comber wrote thus:—

"MY DEAR MR. HODDER,—I have intended coming round to see you to-night, but heard you were at Birmingham, where I have also been all day to-day. Knowing you were in the neighbourhood, I should have come long before this to call upon my old teacher; but I have been so pressed with meetings and other work. . . . I have been glad to hear you are well. It is so very long since I have seen you; and I look forward so much to once more seeing such an old friend.—In happy remembrance of Crawford Street, I remain, your affectionate old class-boy,
TOM COMBER."

Amongst his wedding gifts was a souvenir from

Mr. Hodder. We insert his acknowledgment as indicating the ingenuousness of Mr. Comber's nature, always so strikingly characteristic, as well as showing the mutual regard and esteem existing between the donor and recipient.

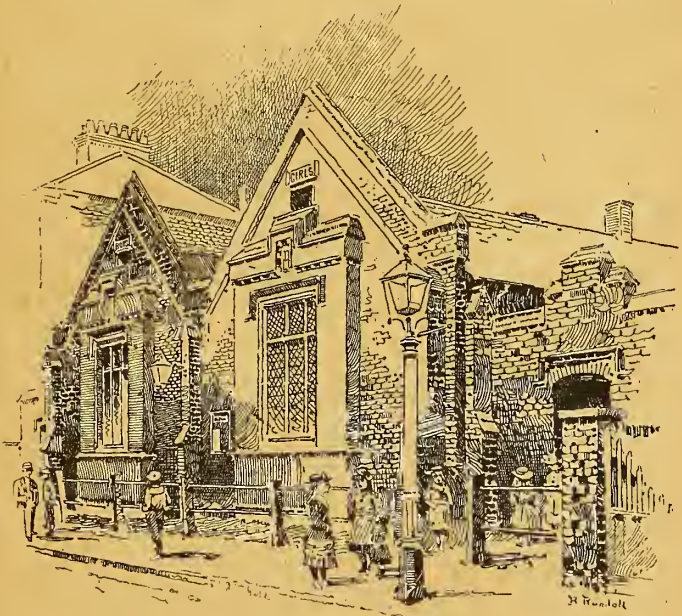
“MY DEAR MR. HODDER,—Please excuse our not writing before, and accept our thanks for your kindness in sending us the pretty trinkets, which we shall both greatly value. They made me wear a lavender tie on my wedding day, or I should have had my scarf-pin in a cravat; but Minnie wore her necklet and locket on the occasion. We both like very much the presents you sent us; and it is very pleasant to me to stumble across my kind old teacher again. Thank you for your good wishes on behalf of ourselves and our work. I do trust the Lord will fulfil all our hopes concerning the future. Let Him prosper us as He will; we just go to do His work.—With affectionate regards to you and Mrs. Hodder from us both, we remain, dear Mr. Hodder, yours very sincerely,
TOM and MINNIE COMBER.”

But to return, circumstances occasioning the retirement of Mr. Hodder, Mr. Rickards succeeded him in his class. As already stated, Tom was then about fourteen—an age when, with his frank nature and previous home training, he was likely to prove susceptible to the helpful influence of a man like Mr. Rickards. It will be seen in the correspondence recorded in the following pages, how immense was the obligation under which he ever felt his faithful teacher had placed him.

The reader will be interested in perusing the following reminiscences kindly supplied by Mr. Rickards himself, in which amongst other particulars, the circumstances are fully described that determined Tom Comber's future career. Before giving these reminiscences, it may fittingly be observed that years

after the Sunday-school teacher and scholar were brought into a personal relationship through the marriage of the latter to the daughter of the former, the Minnie previously mentioned.

“When I remember him first,” says Mr. Rickards, “he was about fourteen years of age,—a quiet, thoughtful, attentive lad. I believe he was thoroughly



CRAWFORD STREET SUNDAY SCHOOL.

earnest then in his resolve to know what it was to be a Christian, and his effort to reach to the Christian standard. I never had any trouble to get him to listen. Indeed, the whole class were good listeners. After a time, I found that two or three of the most earnest of them were having private prayer-meetings, in which they were praying for the class

and the school. Of these Tom and his cousin were the leaders.

“ I then got the class to come to my house once a fortnight—when we had singing, a ten minutes’ talk on some good subject, and prayers by the lads themselves. In connection with these meetings it was my habit to impress on them the absolute necessity of making their prayers *real*—that they were not to ask for things which they might fancy were the proper things to plead for—but only for that which was the real longing of their hearts. ‘Mind, if I catch you saying anything you heard the minister say last Sunday, or repeat the petitions of a deacon at the prayer-meeting on Monday, I’ll stop you at once.’ This was the caution they got from their teacher, and only once did I have to stop one of the lads for wandering into meaningless words—and that lad was *not* Comber. The burden of *his* cry was always ‘Lord, I want to be a missionary—to go into the darkness and bring Thy light into it—to tell the heathen of the Saviour who is waiting to help and save them as He has saved me.’ And sometimes he would speak of the difficulties in his way, which seemed almost insurmountable, caused mainly by his lack of early training. But he always cast them upon the Lord, and besought Him to make a way for him into the mission field.

“From what he has told me, I believe his first conscious day of brightness and gladness, in the sense of sin forgiven and acceptance by his Saviour, was on an Easter Sunday morning, when our subject was the great commission, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature!’ In the course of that lesson I told them how often I had lamented my not being a Christian till thirty years of age; that had I taken Jesus for my Saviour in my boyhood, I was sure I should have been a missionary. And then I appealed to them as my lads—would not one of them go in my place and stead—stating how glad

I should be if any of them would take this great purpose into their hearts. Comber has told me more than once, that there and then he said to himself and to God that if the Lord would have him as a missionary, he would go. And I believe that there also he felt the conscious light and love of the Saviour in his soul. I believe, as far as his purpose and effort were concerned, he had been a Christian since his childhood, but the realisation and joy of it only came to him in response to his offer of himself to God as His servant among the heathen.

“During the succeeding months (how many I cannot recollect) he had to meet with discouragement from many to whom he mentioned his purpose. He made me his confidant in all these matters. I gave him two pieces of advice, on both of which he acted. The first was ‘Keep your purpose warm before God in prayer every day of your life. Let nothing prevent your talking with Him about it. If He wants you for a missionary, He will make the way for you.’ The second was, ‘If you want to be a missionary, you must work hard for it. Even God Himself cannot employ you, if you are not fit for it. These great positions in God’s army do come to us from heaven, but they come to those who are ready for them.’

“An incident during his school life may be mentioned. It was in connection with a neglected lad in the Sunday school, who, having behaved himself badly in more than one class, was threatened with expulsion. The question was simply expulsion or would we try him in *our* class? This was a question which, as their teacher, I thought it best for the lads to settle among themselves. When the appeal was made, they all voted for his reception, Comber being among the first and most earnest to recommend that course. It is interesting to know that not long afterwards, when that poor lad had removed from the class and the school, he laid hold of the Saviour as his own, and wrote to his teacher thanking him for

the kindness shown in receiving him, and teaching him, and helping him to know the better things.

“Comber’s character was always the same—calm, quiet, thoughtful, conscientious, laborious and resolute, with not a particle of combativeness—but just the character suitable for the work to which he gave his life.”

In after years, Mr. Comber expressed his confidence, that had it not been for his teacher’s earnest leading to the Saviour—for his gentle, patient teaching, his forbearance and long-suffering with him in his foolishness and blindness—he would never have become a missionary.

For six years Tom continued in his business, not only gaining the approbation of his father on account of his diligence, but by the early development of a spirit of manliness commanding the respect of his fellow-workmen. From the first, however, there were indications that he was destined to some other than a commercial pursuit. In going to and from the city he might invariably have been seen with a book, reading it or discussing its contents with his father. On one occasion, a gentleman who was with him in an omnibus, observed him intently perusing a volume. Ascertaining the character of the work, he became so much interested as to offer the use of his library, which generous offer was eagerly accepted. The gentleman was Mr. Franklin Allport, connected with the church of which the Rev. John Burnett was formerly pastor—a warm friend of young men, and one of the earliest Sabbath-school teachers. The customers upon whom Tom called in the city shops would often express their surprise at his remembering so well the matters he had to transact, seeing he always brought his book with him, and would be reading it whenever spare moments of waiting allowed.

“Do I ever think of the old days?” he asks his

father in one of his African letters. "Ah me, yes! Bow Lane, and that lazy son of yours who used to loiter along carelessly, linger at all the newspaper windows when you sent him on errands, and run hard back to try and regain lost time, and who was so seldom 'blown up for it.' Gracechurch Street, the Hall, Clerkenwell, the workmen's train, Bryer's, coffee-shops, &c. Dear me! how different is my life now; I wonder if I could fit a brooch pin, or estimate the weight and value of a diamond now?"

Other friends besides Mr. Allport furnished him with material for reading, and guided him as to his choice of books; particularly may be mentioned his pastor, Dr. Stanford, and Mr. Norton Smith, whose counsels and help were of great advantage.

At the age of fifteen he eagerly availed himself of the facilities for instruction afforded by the evening classes at Mr. Spurgeon's college. From his tutors, Mr. Gracey and Mr. Fergusson, he received much benefit. His progress, as might be expected, was satisfactory; not particularly striking for its brilliancy or marked by exceptional genius, but real and uniform. "His course," testifies Mr. Gracey, "appeared in its very earliest as in its latest stages, a very even and gradual development of strength by means of industry and faith. He must have been a member of my evening class for at least from two to three years. Here he made his earliest acquaintance with Latin and Greek; and had as companions city missionaries, Sunday-school teachers, street preachers, young men preparing like himself to enter college, and those engaged in country missions and other branches of Christian work. His character even then seemed so well rounded and balanced that I cannot point out any one feature as being very prominent. Only this I felt about him, that he meant to advance, and to advance altogether."

On one of the important occasions—when Mr Spurgeon meets the most promising of the students

of these evening classes—Tom Comber was required to give an address. His Sunday-school teacher, who was invited to be present, was deeply impressed with the intelligence and earnestness of his speech. And when he closed, as he did, with the recitation of a piece of poetry that teacher had composed, the refrain of which was,—

“To leave a poor, dark, sinful world better than I found it,”

he received general acclamation, being highly praised by Mr. Spurgeon himself.

It was in the year 1868 Thomas Comber publicly professed his faith in the Saviour by observing the ordinance of baptism. This New Testament rite was administered in Denmark Place Chapel by the Rev. J. T. Wigner; Dr. Stanford, though present, feeling unequal to the duty. There can be no doubt that in this instance, as in so many others, the godly influence of a Christian mother had much to do with early decision for Christ; but it is also equally certain that through the voice of the Sunday-school teacher the Lord called His young servant to the consideration of the claims of missionary work.

Towards the end of the period of which this chapter treats, from being a scholar he became a very active teacher in the Sunday school; and, amongst other ways in which he sought to serve the Saviour, his zeal led him, accompanied by a relative, fearlessly to enter public-houses, that, at bars and in tap-rooms, he might speak the Word of Life to men who had sunk low in vice. In tract-distribution and in ragged-school work he was most devoted.

Thus did Tom Comber pass the years of his youth, nurtured in the fear of God by pious and loving parents; privileged to an exceptional degree by the instruction and friendship of no ordinary Sunday-school teachers; enjoying the goodwill and ministry of so eminent a pastor as Dr. Stanford; and availing

himself, as far as his business occupations would permit, of every opportunity he could seize to fit himself for future usefulness.

Before closing this chapter it should be stated that, in his fourteenth year, he was called to sustain the heaviest sorrow which boyhood can experience ; his mother, who for years had been in delicate health, being removed by death. Her memory he ever felt he had more than sufficient reason to cherish with the tenderest affection.



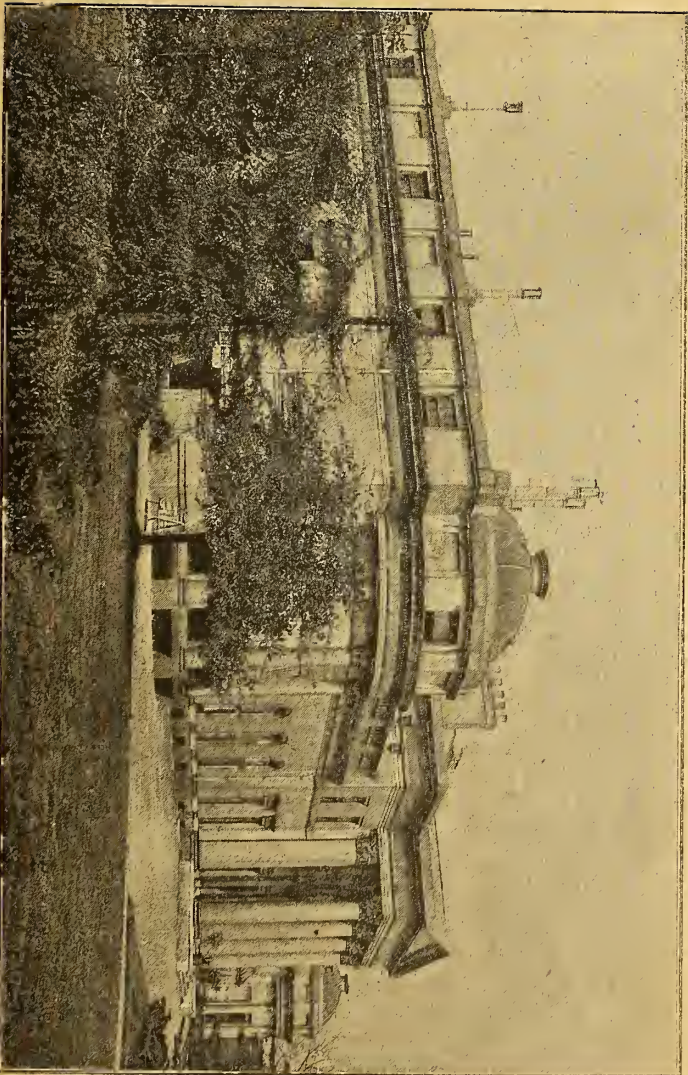


CHAPTER II.

HIS COLLEGE LIFE.

TIME having confirmed in his own mind the determination to become, if possible, a missionary, as well as having satisfied others of the existence of mental and spiritual qualification for such a vocation, Thomas Comber was advised by his pastor, Dr. Stanford, and other friends, to seek admission into the Baptist College in Regent's Park, under the presidency of the Rev. Joseph Angus, D.D. As one of the preliminaries to this admission, he was required to preach before the church of which he was a member. It was naturally a trying ordeal; but one who was present testifies to the approval with which his discourse was received, and to the cordiality with which a recommendation was forwarded to the College Committee urging his acceptance. His suitability being further satisfactorily ascertained, he entered the Institution in the year 1871, in his nineteenth year; being considerably assisted by a fund raised amongst the members of the Denmark Place congregation, his old friend Mr. Norton Smith acting as treasurer.

The Divine Providence having thus placed him in circumstances so favourable to preparation for the



From a Photograph by]

REGENT'S PARK COLLEGE.

[Messrs. Elliott & Fry.]

work upon which his mind and heart were set, Thomas Comber prayerfully and diligently made good use of his advantages. The opinion is sometimes expressed that residence in a college, such as the one he now entered, is not calculated to deepen the spiritual life or to increase the Christian devotedness of the student. If by spiritual life and Christian devotedness be meant sentimental pietism, a religiousness which consists largely in the free use of cant phrases and ostentatious airs, then it may be fully conceded that college life is not desirable; but for the development of a real, manly, strong piety, such a life may, if the student choose, prove most helpful. The student course of Thomas Comber might unhesitatingly be cited in correction of the above mistaken opinion. He certainly did not find the religious atmosphere of Regent's Park College detrimental to his spiritual fervour; for his prayerful habits did not become impaired, nor was his spirit of consecration diminished. None of his fellow-students were more ready than he to appreciate a joke, or to enjoy the recreation of athletic sports; but it is also true that, as his college course proceeded, he not only progressed in his educational studies, but as well "grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The following affectionate testimony bearing upon his college days, from the Rev. H. Wright, now of Clifton, probably his most intimate fellow-student, will be read with much pleasure:—

"He always impressed me as being on a higher level of consecration than most other men. He had no doubt as to his devotion to the missionary cause during the whole of his college course. To become a missionary was not with him a possible contingency, but a solemn certainty—precluding the need for renewed consideration or discussion. His face was always 'steadfastly set' towards the work, and it was 'a joy set before him.'

“In the closer intimacy of later years—on rare occasions of supremely sacred conversation—he would express a pained and puzzled, yet respectful surprise that others were the subjects of an uncertainty and hesitation he never felt, and were not under the same sweet constraint with himself. And yet he could keenly discriminate between a missionary enthusiasm inspired—as I well remember in another by the life of David Brainerd—and that inspired by a distinct sense of missionary call. He hesitated not to assure me that the latter only was reliable and likely to be permanent.

“His devotion to religious work in student days is well known, especially to the weekly children’s service at Camden Road. But the measure of his ardour in that service, and his special concern and endeavour for the conversion and consecration of every child’s heart to the Saviour, are only known to those who knew him well. I have known him return from medical study at University College utterly wearied, sometimes too much so to eat; then away to Camden Road; and, after the service, return to the college to write letters of affectionate and earnest appeal to one and another, whom he had reason to believe, from personal conversation, were under religious impression. And the time thus expended up to midnight would be compensated by early study on the following morning.

“His tenacity of purpose and buoyant hopefulness and power of concentration were very marked. He could turn from one occupation to another, and on each successively concentrate without distraction all his energy. His whole soul went alike into either recreation or work. On one occasion I was with him at a Christmas dinner, provided entirely by his exertions for some scores of waifs and strays, gathered by the aid of some city missionaries in Shoreditch. The abandoned joy with which he helped to feast the hungry ‘robins,’ and the hilarious delight with which he shared the subsequent frolic,

and the tender seriousness with which he, when all were still, spoke of the Saviour, and commended Him as the Friend of starving souls, I can never forget. He had a true missionary's love for the lost. He was always seeking souls.

“I think the strain of the serious life was relieved by the deep vein of humour he possessed. Though he never made jest of sacred things, he was quick to see the ludicrous and enjoyed it. His assumed gravity, when drawing others into a share of the fun, was made to appear very whimsical by the dancing mirth in the laughing eye, which would not be controlled. But none ever had to complain of his humour. His heart was too kind to be a quiver for arrows of sarcasm or scorn; and if another, less noble, ever wounded him, he could accept it without retaliation; and though he might privately offer reasonable remonstrance, he never exhibited resentment, nor became alienated from his friend. His piety passed uninjured through the test of college life. No duty robbed him of seasons of protracted prayer. Intimate associates not only know how much he prayed, but they can testify to it. In the study, however weary, during the holiday, however alluring the society, in the tent, encamped by the Thames with beach boys and friends, nothing deprived him of prayer. He habitually walked and talked with God. He was entirely without vanity. He never boasted nor fished for compliments, nor affected the humility which thinly covers pride. He always showed that unconscious simplicity which won the confidence and respect of all. I am sure that through his college days he made not a single enemy, but secured the affection of all; and when the ship which bore him to Africa was weighing anchor, his fellow-students suspended study to gather together, and for an hour, affection for him and faith in God were blended in one expression, as we commended him to God and to the word of His grace.”

The warm affection and spiritual solicitude Tom Comber felt for his brothers, Sidney and Percy, form a beautiful feature in his character. And there is no doubt but that to his influence should mainly be referred their decision for Christ, and their consecration to missionary work. Many were the letters of tender love that passed between the brothers. We insert here, as having been written from college, two of these epistles addressed to his youngest brother Percy when about the age of fourteen :—

“MY DEAR BROTHER,—I have not forgotten that to-morrow is your birthday ; I thought of it the first thing this morning, and you may be sure I did not forget you in prayer to ‘Our Father.’ I very earnestly wish you many happy returns of the day, and hope that with you each year may be better, truer, happier than the last.

“I often feel, Percy, that I should like to see more of you. I so seldom come home, as almost nine Sundays out of ten I go somewhere to preach, and during the week I am so busy that I feel I ought to work all night long ; and so—as I can so seldom get a sight of you—I want to propose that you write to me *every week* regularly, and I will write to you as often. It will help you in spelling, writing, and composition, and I hope will be helpful to you spiritually. Sid used to do so every Monday evening, but he now is coming to see me every week instead. Suppose you choose an evening when you can best spare an hour, and devote it *regularly* to writing to me. Show this to ma (his stepmother), and tell her what I say ; I will pay for postage, and I am sure she will give you paper and envelopes. I enclose a stamp to begin with, and shall expect a letter from you before a week is over. I have got a little pocket dictionary here for you, which Sid can bear to you when he comes to see me next.

“I have often wished, my dear Percy, that you

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“I have often wished, my dear Percy, that you

could come to our children's services. They are so good, so well attended, so happy and useful. (I wish we lived nearer together.) We are just forming a young Christian's band. There are about twelve who can truly answer 'yes' to the following questions—'Do you love Jesus? Are you trusting in Jesus as your own precious Saviour? Will you try by the help of Jesus to keep from anything that is sinful? Will you try to be more like Jesus every day? Will you try to work for Jesus?' And when they have well thought over and prayed over these questions, and can truly from the heart answer 'yes' to each, we admit them into a band of young Christians.

"Now, although you cannot come to any of our services, yet I should like you to be admitted into our band; and I have felt at times that you could from your heart answer 'yes' to all the above questions. Do you know, Percy, I think that you have often given your heart to Jesus, but have perhaps taken it away again. Now, I want you to give it again, and let Jesus keep it. Jesus told His disciples to *continue* in His love, to *keep* loving Him, and following Him; now, we can't *keep ourselves*, we are so weak; but, if we like, *Jesus* will keep us. Jude said, 'Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling,' and David said, 'Wilt Thou not keep my feet from falling?' So we may feel that though we cannot keep ourselves Christians, yet Jesus is *able* and *willing* to keep us.

"Now, as to these questions, and to our first becoming Christians, I want you to see clearly what a Christian is. If a man can say, 'I believe that Jesus died on the cross to *save* me (from the punishment of my sin, and from the sin itself), and so I mean to love Him as much as ever I can,'—if a man can say this and mean it, he is a Christian.

"A Christian does not *hope* or *think* he is saved, he is *sure* of it. Why? Because Jesus said (through Paul), 'Believe on the Lord, and you—may? no!—

SHALL be saved.' A Christian does not *hope* or *think* that heaven is his home, he is sure of it. Why? Because Jesus said, 'He that believeth on Me *hath* everlasting life.'

"A little girl wrote me a letter the other day in which she said, 'I do not *hope* or *think* that Christ died for me, I am SURE of it; because Christ died for sinners, and I am a sinner.' And so, my dear brother, directly we believe that Jesus died in our place, for us, then we are sure that we are saved.

"Now I want you to keep the paper of questions enclosed, and earnestly think and pray over them until you can answer them. I know you want to be a Christian, you want to be saved, you want to go to heaven, and you do feel that you love Jesus, although not so much as you wish to do and hope to do.

"I pray for you and for dear Sidney every day, and I do hope that you will grow up earnest, useful Christians.

"I have a birthday present here for you, but it is too large to come to you by post, so tell Sidney to come and see me on Friday evening (Thursday I am engaged out of doors).

"Love to father, ma, and Pussy, and love to and prayers for you, my dear brother.—Your affectionate brother,
TOM."

"MY DEAR PERCY,—I have been going to write to you day after day, and at last I am able to do so. I was so glad to have your letter, and I want us to write to one another as often as we can. I won't keep you waiting so long again.

"I am going to give a lecture on Africa with dissolving views to-morrow evening. I wonder if anyhow you could manage to come, if your master would let you leave early. I have sent a ticket in case. It begins at seven o'clock, and you would have to leave rather early, and take a ticket from Peckham Rye to Camden Road—return; and

fulness and depth of your sympathy with me away here. I shall never forget your kindly, affectionate words at Camden Road on that farewell night; they were almost too much for me, but showed me the depth of your nature and feelings. I shall watch your career with closest, most earnest, sympathising attention, and look forward with happy, bright thoughts at the prospect of seeing your face, and hearing your voice again. Meanwhile, 'the Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.'

"*P.S.*—I scarcely like to send this wretchedly disjointed letter. I am ashamed of it as an R. P. C. man, but composition is quite a labour on the West Coast."

In one of his early African letters to his old Sunday-school teacher he wrote: "Those five years of college life, to one so slow to learn as I, were quite needed; and above classics, theology, and other subjects, I have learnt something of myself, and I feel now more grateful for this than for anything else—that the Lord has not allowed me to go to a work like this in entire ignorance of my own nature and disposition, with eyes unopened to my weaknesses. I only wonder at my being so slow to learn, and at the patience of my teachers, who, in spite of foolishness and obstinacy, have not given me up as a bad job. I wonder how I have so many friends; I wonder how I got into college; I feel that if I were a member of a college committee, and a candidate like myself were to come before me, I should refuse him directly. However, it makes me feel sure that these important steps of mine have been guided by the Lord."



CHAPTER III.

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES AT CAMDEN ROAD.

REFERENCE was made in the letters recorded in the previous chapters to the children's services connected with the Camden Road Chapel, the scene for so many years of the ministry of the Rev. F. Tucker, B.A. Those who attended these services, or were interested in them, would think any memoir of Mr. Comber most defective which did not give them prominent mention; for it was he who originated, and for a considerable time conducted them.

Mr. Comber's natural fondness for children, together with his remarkable gift for interesting and instructing them, made him thoroughly at home in their presence. Their tender hearts were not slow to respond to the influence of such a teacher and friend. Over many of the members of the class he gained an influence which resulted in their highest spiritual good; and not a few are living to-day, whose Christian character and life bear unquestionable testimony to the real usefulness of his labours on their behalf.

It was on a Wednesday evening, the 11th of November, 1874, that the first of these meetings was

held, and it was a decided success, for Mr. Comber had fortunately gained beforehand the ready sympathy of the Sunday-school teachers, who had promised to be present themselves, and to induce as many of their scholars as they could to attend. During two years, until he left for Africa, he was invariably to be found, week by week, on a Wednesday evening at this service. He commenced, in connection with it, a boy's prayer-meeting, a class for inquirers, and a girl's missionary working party; this last being started for the purpose of making clothes for native children in Africa, and to help to support a native boy, who should be his personal attendant, and who was to be called "Camden Road." The following letters, one written to the class generally, and the other to an individual member of it, will show how earnest Mr. Comber was in seeking the spiritual welfare of the children, and how admirably adapted he was to engage in such important, and by no means easy Christian work:—

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—Earnestly and affectionately do I wish you all a very happy New Year.

"In looking back over the year 1875, I think that we have great reason for thankfulness in connection with our Wednesday evening services. Perhaps you remember times when you have found the meetings to be very pleasant, and have really enjoyed them. This has been because the Saviour has been there, and you have felt His presence, and I daresay have heard His voice speaking to you lovingly and earnestly. So no wonder the meetings have been sweet and precious. But, perhaps, as you think of the services of the past year, you have a far greater reason for joy and gratitude, because you have found Jesus as your Saviour; He has forgiven your sins, and you can now say, 'The Lord is *my* shepherd, *I* am one of His lambs.' Indeed, you *should* rejoice and be glad.

"And now 1875 has gone, and we are just begin-

ning a fresh year. I want you, with me, to give yourselves solemnly to Jesus for the year 1876. Tell Him that you will try not so often to forget Him; and ask Him to help you to love Him, and to love one another more; to be more like Jesus every day; so that this year may be far better than the last.

“But perhaps you have not yet given your hearts to Jesus. He has sent you many invitations,—*perhaps hundreds*; but you have not accepted them. This letter is another invitation. All I ask you to do is to trust in Jesus as your Saviour, and to resolve that you will try to follow Him. Remember this is something you *can* do. Oh, I do very earnestly ask you to decide now!

“I do not know when I shall have to say ‘good-bye’ to you. I may start for Africa in February, or it may be July. Oh, how it would encourage me for my work there if all your hearts were given to Jesus! You all know that this is what I want. And this is the only way in which you can have a happy New Year.—Your affectionate friend, T. J. COMBER.”

“MY DEAR MAY,—I am so glad to see your face again at the meeting, it seems a very long time since you and Emmie were there, but now I hope you will both be able to come out all through the winter services, if weather permits.

“Didn’t we have a nice meeting to-night with Mr. Wigner? I am sure that many of those who stayed really wanted to love the Saviour, and to enter into His fold. Oh, do pray for these services, dear May, that *all* the children who come may give their hearts to Jesus, and be the Saviour’s lambs.

“As to those questions I spoke to you about, we shall not form that young Christian’s band which we intended, and so shall not give out the question papers, but I will put them down here, and you can answer them earnestly to yourself and to the Saviour.

“I feel sure, May, that you can answer ‘yes’ to all these questions, and that you are one of the Saviour’s lambs; and I do hope that you will love Him more and more every day, and find out more and more what a precious, dear Saviour He is.

“Give my love to Emmie and to Gertrude. I hope to see them soon, and that they are trying to follow Jesus. I meant to have written to you all three while you were at Bournemouth, but I was so busy. I should like to know what you did there, and whether you met together for prayer. I should be so very glad to have letters from you all three; I have so much to do that I cannot write to you all.

“Do not forget to pray for our meetings, and also, will you ask the Saviour to greatly bless some meetings we are going to hold at Southend to-morrow and Friday?—Your affectionate friend,

“T. J. COMBER.”

It was at Camden Road that Mr. Comber was brought into association with John Hartland, in whom he indeed found a kindred spirit, one who like himself had strong desires for a missionary life. A friendship rapidly sprang up between the two young men,—a friendship hereafter to deepen into the affection of a Christian brotherhood as tender as it was strong. Succeeding pages will show the strength of the fraternal tie which bound the two together in mutual esteem and love. In John Hartland, Tom Comber found a willing helper at the children’s services; and when the time came for the latter to depart for Africa, it was to John Hartland he intrusted his precious work. It is fitting that here, in this connection, we should refer to the services which were held when he bade farewell to his youthful charges, as well as present our readers with specimens of the letters in which he assured them of his continued and unflagging interest, though by so doing we somewhat anticipate our narrative.

"Now the time had come," says Mrs. Hartland, the mother of John, "when the faithful leader of the children was called to other work. It was a sore trial to him and them, for he had so entirely won the hearts of his little flock."

On Wednesday, October 25th, 1876, a Social Tea Meeting was held to take leave of him. More than a hundred children were there with their teachers. After tea, Mr. Comber showed them some articles from his outfit,—compass, helmet, hammock, &c.

A testimonial had been prepared written on parchment, as follows :—

Mizpah.

TESTIMONIAL

PRESENTED TO THE

REV. THOMAS J. COMBER,

BY

The Children and Friends connected with the Camden Road Children's Service, in happy and affectionate remembrance of many pleasant services, and as a token of their hearty appreciation of his loving and Christian labour among them. Praying that God will still be with him, and abundantly bless him, and grant him great success in the work on which he is about to enter among the natives of Western Africa.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee :

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee :

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

This was signed by the children, and Mr. Hartland had the pleasure of presenting it to him in their name, together with a magic-lantern for which they had subscribed.

Mr. Comber was deeply affected by this expression of their love, and received their gifts joyfully, promis-

ing that he would not part with the testimonial as long as he lived, and heartily thanking them for both testimonial and lantern. He then spoke a few words to them about Africa, the land to which he was going.

Wednesday, 1st of November, was his last service. Mr. Bishop came early and brought his magic-lantern to show the children the slides which the teachers of the Sunday school had given to Mr. Comber. Mr. Wright, from Regent's Park College, gave an address to the children from the words, "Sorrowing most of all for the words that he spake, that they should see his face no more," applying them to their leader leaving them, earnestly asking those who were not decided for Christ to give their hearts to Him then, and thus send their beloved friend away rejoicing.

Mr. Comber then took the remainder of the service, speaking from the text, "Now, then, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and truth," encouraging them by looking back, and exhorting them to "go on," asking their prayers, and concluding with an earnest appeal to all.

After the general meeting, at which there were a great number, there was a meeting of the teachers of the classes connected with the service; they sang the third verse of "Safe in the arms of Jesus." John Hartland offered prayer. Mr. Comber said a few earnest, encouraging words, and then commended himself and his fellow-labourers in the school to the care of their Father in heaven, closing with the benediction. So ended the last service of their beloved and prayerful leader, Mr. Comber, amongst the children.

His faithful, loving words and noble life have never been forgotten by them; his name has ever been green in their memories.

Nor did he ever forget them. In after years, looking back to the time when he and his beloved colleague worked together "hand in hand" for the

children of Camden Road, he often referred to it as "one of the happiest periods of his life."

At the moment of departure, whilst waiting for his cab, Mr. Comber scribbled a hurried note to his friend, John Hartland, in which he says, "Tell those children on Wednesday evening how much I feel leaving them, how dearly I should like to see their faces



JOHN HARTLAND.

again. God bless them." And when he reached Liverpool, he wrote more at length:—

"Oh, I felt so lonely last night coming from Sheffield to Liverpool, and I took out some of the photographs of the dear little ones at Camden Road, and thought of and prayed for them one by one; it was the next best to seeing their faces. And when I thought over the loving wishes they had expressed in their letters, and the assurances in so many of them

that they would try to follow the Saviour, that they would pray for me when I was far away, I was greatly cheered and strengthened.

“The Lord bless you especially at the services; the Lord make you feel very happy and at home in the work; the Lord touch the hearts of the children continually, and as a skilled musician draw out heavenly music from them.

“Give my love to the dear children on Wednesday next. Tell them it is as hard for me to part from them as it is from anything or anyone else; that I shall think of and pray for them very much, especially on Wednesday evenings; that I shall always meet with them, and though they don't see my form at the desk, yet I *shall* be there in thought and heart. I hope they will all continue their attendance at the service, and be greatly blessed by Him whose delight it is to bless children. I will write a letter to them from Madeira—the first place we stay at. Thank them all for the letters they have written to me, which show me how much they love me, and all the good success they wish me. I shall have so very much to do that I shan't be able to write separately to them, although I should much like to do so; but I shall be rejoiced to hear from them separately, if they will write to me, telling me exactly what they feel about their love to Jesus, as that is what I most wish to know about. I should like to have the photographs of those who have not given them to me. If they put their letters together, several of them might go in one envelope, with a six-penny stamp, written on thin paper, and addressed Mr. Comber, Victoria, Cameroons, West Africa. Will you give them each next Wednesday a copy of 'The Story of Billy Bray' (published at the Wesleyan Conference Office, Paternoster Row). I would also like it to be given to Belle Isle if you would ask Mr. Johnstone to do so for me. I think two hundred will be quite sufficient (P.O.O. for twelve shillings en-

closed). I shall try to send a letter to Lucy Harrison in this. I think her address is 63 Falkland Road; Miss Emma Keen can tell you. I have written to Alice Smith."

The promised letter from Madeira duly arrived, and is inserted appropriately here as a sample of the many admirable epistles he afterwards wrote, not only to the children at Camden Road, but also to Sunday schools generally, some of which have appeared in the *Juvenile Missionary Herald*, greatly to the delight of the youthful readers of that magazine. It is not every one who can write or speak so as really to interest and profit the young. Mr. Comber in a remarkable degree possessed this rare gift. The letter to his young friends now given, as well as those already inserted, will abundantly justify this opinion:—

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—This is the third time I have tried to write a letter to you since I have been on board. On the two former occasions, the pitching and rolling of the vessel, added to an aching head, compelled me to give up. We are now, however, comparatively quiet, being sheltered from a heavy gale that is blowing all around us.

"We have come more than a thousand miles by water, and it does seem so far away from home. The ship started from Liverpool rather later than was expected,—on Sunday morning, at eleven o'clock. And just about the time Mr. Tucker was giving out the first hymn in chapel, the order was given to 'let go,' and we steamed off.

"Our Sunday on board was far different from yours at Camden Road. All was noise and bustle here, putting the cargo in order, and preparing to meet the 'troubled sea.' We should like to have held a service on board, but there was no opportunity; but, in the afternoon, Mr. Thomson and I went into his cabin together, and asked God to help us on the

voyage and bring us safely to West Africa, and we did not forget to ask Him to watch over and bless you all in England. And every day, unless either of us is unwell, we kneel together for the same purpose.

“Perhaps some of you think that you would rather like a sea voyage, say, for a few days or a week, but I think you would get tired of it much sooner than that. We came down the Irish Channel, passed the Great Orme’s Head and Point Lynas in Wales, and so on, until at about two o’clock on Monday morning we passed the last point visible in dear old England; and when we were told that, leaving home seemed sadly real. All day Sunday and Monday we had nice smooth water, but it was a little rougher on Tuesday and Wednesday, as we were passing the Bay of Biscay. The after-part of Wednesday was very pleasant, and I went on deck and sat back in one of the seats, and thought about you all at Camden Road, knowing that it was just about the time you would be having the service; and I wondered what hymns you would have, and much enjoyed singing over to myself some of our beautiful hymns—‘There’s a Friend for Little Children,’ ‘Saviour, like a Shepherd lead us,’ ‘Come to the Saviour,’ especially entering into and feeling the chorus—

‘Joyful, joyful, will the meeting be,
When from sin our hearts are pure and free,
And we shall gather, Saviour, with Thee,
In our eternal home.’

I remembered many of you by name, asking that you might earnestly heed and try to follow the loving words of your friend, Mr. Hartland, whom God has now called to be your leader.

“You all remember the time when the children of Israel lost one leader (Moses), and had another given them (Joshua). Joshua led them on to many victories, they overcame all their enemies, and were led victoriously into the land of Canaan; they entered

into the kingdom God had given them. So, dear children, there is a kingdom into which we enter directly we take Jesus as our King and Saviour. God sent me, like Moses, to lead you into it. Some of you have entered into the promised land, and can sing happily—

‘Jesus loves me, and I *know* I love Him.’

“But there are others who are not there yet. Oh, that Mr. Hartland may, like Joshua, lead many of you into that dear kingdom; and then, if we never see each other again on earth, we (the children of the King) shall all meet in His palace, and ‘see the King in His beauty.’ Oh, I feel as if it would be bitter sorrow for me if some of you, whom I love so much, and for whom I have prayed so often, should be absent when He gathers ‘the gems of His kingdom.’

‘All the pure ones, all the bright ones
His loved and His own.’

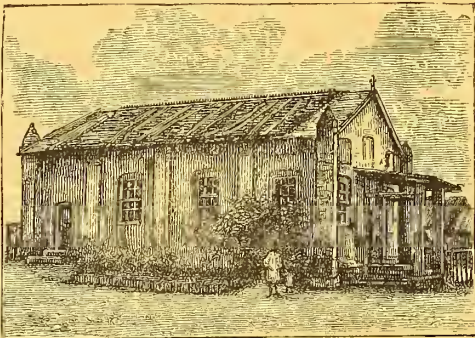
Only ‘*His own*,’ dear children, if you give your hearts to Him and try to follow Him.

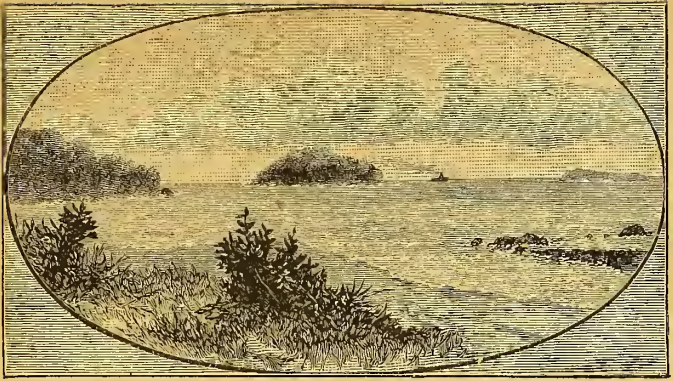
“Well, I must finish this long letter, and I will do so by telling you what our position now suggested to me. Here we are, in the middle of a stormy, angry sea. As I write, the wind is howling terribly. There are many vessels out in the open sea in great, sore danger; there are some wrecked, over which the sea is dashing, exulting in its victory; perhaps, as I write, there is one dashing on to the rocks (O God, gracious God, save the people in them! Many of them, perhaps, are not prepared to die). And yet, with all this going on around us, we are safe where we are, sheltered by a great rock. If we leave the rock we are at the mercy of the storm. Whom does the rock remind us of? The great, the only rock of safety—Jesus Christ. Oh, that each one of you may offer David’s prayer, ‘Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.’ If you are under the shelter of the

rock Jesus, you are safe; if not, you are at the mercy of the storms, which will prevent you from reaching the 'desired haven'—heaven.

"Some of you feel a little uneasy and restless when you think of death,—of your having to go to God's judgment seat. You don't like to think of it. Well, you are quite safe if you are under the shelter of the Rock. Oh! come to the rock Jesus, each one of you; take Him as your Saviour, begin to follow Him as your Shepherd; and then we shall all meet safely in the place where there is no more sea. And if you are sheltered beneath the Rock, don't leave it, keep close to it, or else you will not be safe.

"I must now say 'good-bye.' I will write again when I get to Africa. May God take each one of you into His arms and bless you is the earnest prayer of your affectionate friend, T. J. COMBER."





CHAPTER IV.

ACCEPTED BY THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
AND SENT FORTH TO WESTERN AFRICA.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Comber entered the College in Regent's Park with the most settled purpose to become a missionary, and a missionary to Africa, the application to the Society with which he desired to be identified could not be entertained until near the close of his collegiate course. And when at length he appeared before the missionary sub-committee, probably not one of its members was very deeply impressed with the exceptional fitness, the remarkable qualities of the candidate. His devotion was readily recognised, his abilities and attainments were acknowledged, his natural disposition was approved; but who sitting on that Board had the faintest idea that the young man upon whose merits they were called to adjudicate would so soon—in the course of a very few years—prove himself worthy to be classed amongst the heroes of the mission field? Circumstances, actual contact with the difficulties and demands of the

work itself, could alone develop, and so reveal, his unsuspected capabilities and hidden resources.

Though accepted by the Baptist Missionary Society in 1875, Mr. Comber was detained in this country for about twelve months, to take a year's training in medicine and surgery. This proved greatly to the advantage of his future work. In the October, however, of 1875, the year of his acceptance, he and three other young brethren—viz., Mr. H. Tucker, Mr. R. E. Gammon and Dr. W. Carey, were publicly designated to their respective spheres of missionary toil. The deeply interesting service was held at Plymouth, and will be remembered especially, by those who were present, for the powerful and solemn address with which Dr. Brock admonished and encouraged the missionaries-elect. It was the last public utterance of that honoured servant of God, and he spoke as if he had already received the summons to enter the presence of his Lord.

Mr. Comber's departure for Africa being delayed by his year's hospital training, a further valedictory service was arranged by his friends at Camden Road Chapel. This took place on the evening immediately following the one referred to in the previous chapter, at which he bade farewell to the children. The date was the 2nd of November, 1876. The Rev. Francis Tucker, B.A., presided. The Rev. Clement Bailache from the Mission House gave an address; and Mr. F. E. Tucker represented the Sunday schools. Mr. Comber closed his speech by quoting the well-known lines from his favourite poet, Tennyson, beginning:—

“More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.”

Two days after, Mr. Comber sailed from Liverpool in the s.s. *Ethiopia* for the land of his adoption, in the company of the Rev. W. Q. Thomson, who was returning after a season of rest. In what frame of mind he took his departure, may be gathered from

the sentiments he expressed to his dear friend, John Hartland :—

“I feel stronger than ever ; I feel calm, trusting in the power, guidance and blessing of the living God, who has called me to make a sacrifice that He will *make up* to me ; and now my one prayer is, not for guidance, encouragement and resignation—these I have no fear of—but for grace to live the highest, noblest life, to live very close to Him in prayer, to realise spiritual things, to have more the spirit of Jesus. Hartland, my dear fellow, pray for me in this.

“I am so utterly unworthy of this post of honour, my heart is often so cold and lifeless ; I want to glow with love to Jesus. I want to commune more with Him, and to realise His promises ; I want to love His Word, to love prayer more.

“I am thankful that I have never had a thought of turning back ; forward, upward, heavenward, eagerly pressing on, striving to do, be, what He would have me.”

The voyage was long, occupying no less than forty-one days, being completed on the 5th of December. From communications describing the incidents and experiences of the voyage, a few extracts may be culled :—

“On Sunday afternoon we snapped the last connecting link with dear old England, by letting the pilot go. I daresay you can imagine I soon got home-sick and felt desolate. Cut away from so much dear and congenial society, for the first time I entered into the full meaning of ‘There’s no place like home.’” In the letter to the Camden Road children the terrible storm experienced before reaching Madeira has been vividly described. Had the *Ethiopia* proceeded a few miles farther on her voyage, it is most probable she would have suffered the fate which overtook the other vessels. Such a storm at Madeira had never been remembered. “The cable between Lisbon and Madeira snapped, so we could not

be telegraphed to Liverpool. However, we have come safely through the danger without a rope injured, and, I hope, feel grateful for our preservation."

"I sometimes go up on deck at two or three A.M., and enjoy the clear, beautifully 'starry dome' (N.B. Mathams!). On one of these occasions, the mate on the watch said my conscience must be troubling me as I couldn't sleep, and wanted to know if I'd paid my washing bill before starting. Yesterday we saw the 'mirage' to perfection—a facsimile of the coast line, very deceptive; the captain says he has sometimes fired a gun to attract the attention of a ship which was only an optical delusion. It is a sign that the air is very rarified. The tropical sky was delightful last night. We had a service on board yesterday morning, conducted by Mr. Thomson; nearly all the passengers came to it." Referring to the propensity of the inhabitants of Madeira for fleecing, Mr. Comber humorously remarks: "They will ask four dollars for a chair, and take a dollar at last; they will charge you a shilling or two shillings to take you ashore, and when you want to return, and your vessel is about to go, they refuse to take you for less than twenty or even forty shillings. They are great beggars, and if you ask a question of them, they always expect to be paid for answering it. Madeira seems full of great lazy fellows, who get their living by preying on visitors. I was wild with one fellow. I knew I was close to the post office, and I wanted to post some letters. Seeing a man walking along with some in his hand, I said 'post office,' and showed him my letters; he nodded and showed his, and we each put our letters in the office box, which was in the next street. He touched his hat and held out his hand, but I shook my head indignantly and walked on; and that fellow followed me for half-an-hour, I going along at a good four miles an hour, and he (a small, short-legged man) trotting and shuffling after me. I dived down streets and lanes, lost my way

entirely, and at last seeing a very steep hill, I went sharply to the top, and left him baffled at the bottom, looking surprised, grieved and injured. It was not meanness on my part, for I'd just given a poor beggar sixpence, but I wanted to teach the rascal a lesson."

"We are now eight days late; and are continually calling at little villages on the shore to give out cargo. Sometimes this operation takes a day or more. A great deal of this cargo is 'Superior Gin,' cases of brandy, casks of rum, and other civilising, Christianising influences. Drunkenness and the most flagrant immorality are common on the part of Europeans on the coast. Many of them confess and try to justify the most awful things. It is very sad, and a great drawback to missionary efforts. We went ashore at Bonny, where is the Ju-ju house or devil house. Bonny is a filthy place, and the people live in the greatest dirt and squalor. We went to see King Oko Jumbo, but fortunately he was not at home; for the filthy house he lives in greatly offended one's nostrils, and I was glad not to have to go in. We were followed about by a small crowd of admiring aborigines, and found our way to the Ju-ju house, and saw the piles and stacks of skulls, the remains of those who had been put to death by sacrifice. Some of the skulls were embedded in the clay floor. We scrambled through one hole in the temple wall, and thoroughly examined the inside. I pulled out a double tooth from one of the skulls, just as a memento of the place. When we got outside and on our way back, the Ju-ju man or priest came up to us, wanting to 'palaver' or talk, as we had invaded his sacred courts. He courteously invited us to come to terms for our sacrilege and iconoclasm, and asked us to 'dash' him. Any gift or present is called a 'dash' out here, and the word is equivalent to an English 'tip.' We accordingly dashed him half-a-dollar, with which ill-gotten gain he went off greatly pleased.

“There was an amusing thing occurred at Calabar. We went about the town, and called upon King Archibong, who was engaged in the kingly occupation of picking his teeth with a knife. Giving his knife to the knife-attendant, he called for the snuff-box attendant, who brought a silver snuff-box, which was politely handed to us, and as politely refused. We then went to call on a rich native, named Henschaw Toby, Esq., whose daughter was one of the king's wives. His house was very large, many rooms and several court-yards. One room was furnished ‘English fashion’ as Henschaw proudly called it. We were introduced to one of the Mrs. Toby, very stout, with just the usual cloth round her loins, sitting on the floor heavily ringed with brass from the foot to the knee, and her ankles in consequence sore and chafed. She was smoking ‘a churchwarden,’ a long clay pipe; and shaking our hands, saluted us by—‘American.’ We said, no, we are English; but our guide told us ‘American’ was the Calabar for ‘glad to see you.’ We laughed heartily at the joke. Mr. Toby showed us a group portrait in which he figured. I pointed out a woman in the group, and said, ‘And who is this?’ ‘Oh!’ said he, ‘that there fat woman,’ meaning Mrs. Toby, principal wife.

“We passed the Fantee and Ashantee country with, of course, special interest, and came opposite to Whydah yesterday, where are anchored the *Sirius*, *Contest*, *Pioneer*, and a few more English and two French men-of-war, to blockade Dahomey. I read more of Tennyson than anything else almost, except African travel. Sometimes any mental exercise is impossible. Have you read much of Tennyson? I feel sure you would like his ‘Idylls.’ There are some of the most beautiful and noble lessons taught in them. I read them at college, and have specially now been interested in, ‘Locksley Hall,’ in which there are some grand things (though some of them suit one's morbid moments). There are two lines

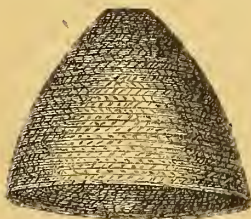
especially, every word of which I have felt very deeply in reference to myself, often—

‘*Knowledge* comes, but *wisdom* lingers, and I linger on the shore;
And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.’

What can be bolder, statelier, grander than—

‘Follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King,
Else, wherefore born?’”

Before closing this chapter, an incident must be recorded which gave Mr. Comber great pleasure. It was nothing less than an unexpected meeting with the Rev. Alfred Saker. An accident happening to her engine, the *Ethiopia* was under the necessity of remaining for repairs three days at Sierra Leone. Just before resuming the voyage a homeward bound vessel was descried. This was discovered to contain Mr. Saker. The veteran of thirty-three years, and the untried, inexperienced, young missionary, were thus brought together. Very thankful was Mr. Comber for this delay; and eagerly did he avail himself of the practical hints which ripened wisdom could so readily impart.





CHAPTER V.

VICTORIA AND CAMEROONS.

THE part of Africa on the west coast, where Mr. Comber began his missionary life, lies in latitude about 4° N. and longitude 9° E.; the agents of the Baptist Missionary Society having laboured there from as early as the year 1840. The Mission originated in the earnest sympathy of the Christian negroes of Jamaica for their fatherland, as that sympathy was displayed on the occasion of their emancipation from slavery. The celebrated William Knibb was visiting England at that memorable time, and was charged to urge upon the Home Committee the claims of Africa. This he did with his characteristically pathetic eloquence, and with such effect that interest was excited and preliminary steps were taken, which eventually resulted in the commencement of missionary operations in the island of Fernando Po, opposite to the Cameroons River.

In the year 1843, the devoted missionary mentioned at the close of the previous chapter, Alfred Saker, departed for the "Dark Continent," there to enter upon a long period of self-denying toil and incalculable

usefulness, extending over no less than thirty-three years. Until the year 1858, the energies of this consecrated servant of God were divided between the claims of Fernando Po and Cameroons, the latter occupying the larger share. For a knowledge of what Mr. Saker was enabled to accomplish during those years; how he won his way into the confidence and affection of the natives; how he introduced amongst them civilising arts and manners; how he acquired their language and gave them the Bible in their own tongue—for this information our readers must be referred to other sources.

But, as Mr. Comber entered upon his practical work as a missionary at Victoria, it will be appropriate, as well as interesting, if the circumstances which led Mr. Saker to found the colony be briefly described. The success attending the efforts of a Protestant Missionary Society in Fernando Po attracted, as was only to be expected, the notice of the Roman Catholics of Spain, who were not slow to influence the Spanish authorities in the island, the result ultimately being the proclamation of an edict prohibiting every religion except that of the Church of Rome. Finding the prohibition was absolute, Mr. Saker resolved to find a home of freedom for such of the members of his congregation as might choose to share it with him. Stimulated by his own love of liberty, and their vows of fidelity, after the manner of the Pilgrim Fathers, he went forth on his noble pursuit. The difficulties and dangers of the exploration would have daunted a less heroic nature. At length a refuge was found on the shore in Ambas Bay. That spot commending itself by its physical features, its facility for harbourage, its two miles of splendid beach, and especially its proximity to the great mountain, Cameroons, which would probably afford a health resort, Mr. Saker was not long in arriving at a decision. In Ambas Bay he accordingly determined to settle down, removing thither such of the Christians in Fernando Po as

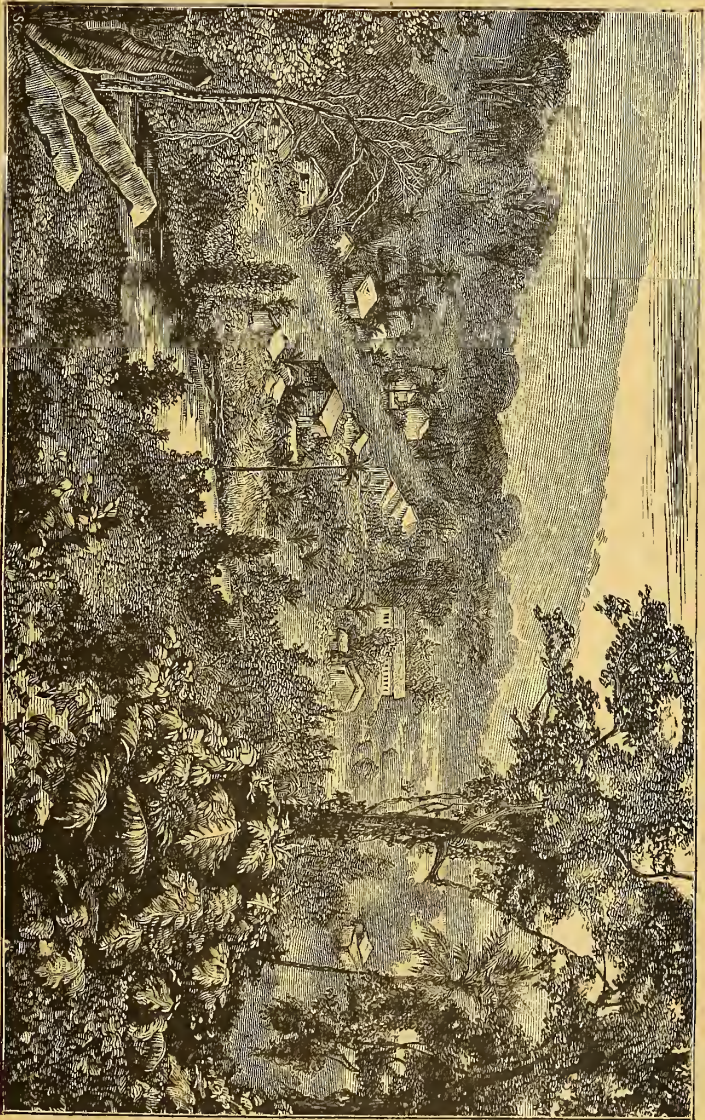
desired to worship God after the dictates of their own conscience.

These were the circumstances in which the colony, named by Mr. Saker "Victoria," was founded. A considerable portion of territory along the coast and inland was duly purchased from King William, the recognised native ruler; and in humble dependence upon God, the work of civilisation and evangelisation began in right good earnest. Roads were laid out, a township was planned, huts for the people and a mission-house and schoolroom were erected.

Here then it was—on a spot where the sacred rights of liberty had triumphed, a spot which had become hallowed by years of Christian toil—that our young missionary began his labours.

His first impressions were most agreeable. "I am trying," he wrote to his father a few days after his arrival, "to make myself feel at home in my newly adopted home; and if the pleasantness of friends and comfortable surroundings could make it so, I should not lack anything. I did not expect that my introduction to Africa would be under such favourable circumstances, but I think it is as well for me to be broken in gradually to my future rough life, for many reasons, amongst others for health's sake; if I began bushing it at once I should be down with fever. The mission-house is occupied at present by Mr. and Mrs. George Thomson, an independent lady and gentleman, who are here I think for a philanthropic object, although they do not preach or teach except by their consistent, good, kind life. Mr. T. is a very simple-hearted, real man, whom no one would like to displease, of a very truthful, reliant nature. Mrs. T. is a pretty, energetic, most agreeable, and lady-like body, simple-hearted like her husband. They were only married six months ago. He has no special occupation, except looking after his stores, building houses and sheds, catching butterflies and beetles, and thinking about a sanatorium which he intends to

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF VICTORIA, ANEAS BAY, WEST AFRICA. (From a Photograph.)



build *pro bono publico*, 4000 feet up the mountain. As far as I can see, he came to Africa out of pure benevolence. I board at their table, simple Anglo-African diet."

Soon after his arrival and before the departure of Mr. W. Q. Thomson—no relation to Mr. George Thomson—with his wife to their station, 2000 feet up the mountain, Mr. Fuller and Mr. Grenfell came from Cameroons, with the latter of whom Mr. Comber was hereafter to be brought into closest fellowship. At this conference of the missionaries, the state of the work at the various stations was reviewed, and plans for future movements were discussed. The missionaries departing, Mr. Comber was left for a while in sole charge of the work at Victoria. He felt deeply the responsibility, but was greatly interested and much cheered. He preached two or three times every Sunday, holding various services during the week, besides treating medically many sick cases. Here is an outline of one day's work, a week day:—Up at six o'clock; a bathe in the brook close by, when there always assembled a small crowd of people to see "white man wash." Cocoa at seven; reading, &c., in his room till nine, when he had breakfast; eleven o'clock he buried a poor man who had long been sick in the bush; twelve until two o'clock, seeing sick people; two o'clock, dinner; three o'clock, he married a Bakwellih couple, having a native preacher as interpreter; after the marriage ceremony, visiting people till five, the time for the children's service; tea at six; and reading until eight, the hour for family worship, and then early retirement.

As the result of his labours, several came to see him as inquirers, seekers after Christ; and some, he was persuaded, were earnest and sincere. He records with much thankfulness the case of a woman named "Johanna," whom he had visited daily in illness, and whose little boy came to be called Mr. Comber's shadow, because he was always following him about

with a tumbler for medicine. Contrary to expectation she recovered ; and the first Sunday she was at chapel, the reading of the story of Christ's sufferings deeply affected her ; and on the Monday she came expressing her earnest desire to give her heart to the Saviour. With much joy the missionary spoke of the willingness of Christ to receive sinners ; the woman declared her faith, and resolved to live a Christian life.

During this early period of his life in Africa, an incident occurred showing how soon Mr. Comber began to exercise that influence over the natives which in his later career was so prominent a feature in his character, and which so largely contributed to his success. Let the incident be told in his own words, as described in a letter to his brother Percy :—" I had a young man brought to see me about a month ago, from a place called Bimbia. He was very sick, and almost a skeleton, scarcely ever ate anything, and was getting thinner every day. As Bimbia was ten miles away, and he was brought in one of the very uncomfortable rough native canoes, I asked those who brought him to leave him at Victoria, promising to do the best I could for him. This was done, one of them staying with him. Three days afterwards I was told that some of his countrymen had come to Victoria and carried the poor fellow off, and also his friend as a prisoner ; and if the sick man died, they were going to kill the other one, as they believed he was guilty of bewitching him, and causing his illness. Well, I determined to go off to Bimbia sharp, and do what I could to prevent such cruelty. So I started in a native canoe, taking with me a black man named Nakko as my interpreter, and Billy Edwards to show me the way back through the forest. When I got to Bimbia I first went to see King William, a quiet, well-meaning young man, whose favour I knew I had, because I had before cured his sister of a painful disease. I told him what I had heard, and asked if

it were all true? Yes! it was quite right. Then I told him my heart was very pained, I was in great trouble about it, and had come to stop it. I showed him how foolish and wicked it was, told him if he allowed it he would have to answer to God for the blood of the murdered man, told him that as I was a doctor I knew what was wrong with the man, and knew he was not bewitched, that there was no such thing as witchcraft. He was convinced, and promised to try and stop it, but there were several men as powerful as himself, though he was king, and I must go and see them. Well, I was successful and glad so far; and went next to see Prince William (no relation to King William). He was a hard-hearted, obstinate fellow, and we had a long palaver, I sitting down on a very low stool he gave me in the hut, speaking as earnestly as possible through my interpreter. God touched his heart, and he promised. Then there were Bertram, Money, Bob Dick, and Bimbia Dick; and they all received me very kindly, and I got their consent too. I went home the next morning very thankful that God had given me influence with these men. The sick man died about a week after, and no one was killed."

But whilst Mr. Comber entered thus heartily into his labours at Victoria, it was in the interior of the country he desired to find his permanent work. Before he left England, through his reading of African travel, particularly the works of Livingstone, he had formed a strong opinion of the importance of reaching and living amongst a people uninfluenced by coast trading. All his previous convictions were now confirmed by practical experience of coast life. He assured the Society at home he felt more than ever that if success and progress in mission work are to be obtained, and a deeper Christian life and spirit amongst the converts, such as would lead to acts of self-denial and lives of consecration, the work must be with the simple native African, uninfluenced by

the evil, harmful examples set by many Europeans on the coast. He was obliged to recognise as true many of the charges made against professing native Christians on the coast: their idleness, self-conceit, selfishness and worldly policy, though he at the same time remembered that the same defects might be seen amongst some professors at home; but he felt there would be far fewer temptations and tendencies to the indulging of such dispositions if there were the simple, unsophisticated African to work upon.

Actuated by these convictions, he made several slight incursions to gain a practical knowledge of the interior, so that he might be able to form his plans for future work. In April of this year, 1877, he resolved upon a more extended journey, but was persuaded to defer it until he had become more thoroughly acclimatised, and had gained more knowledge of African travelling. It was suggested that he should take a preliminary week's journey to gain some experience in matters of food arrangement, camping, and management of men; and it was thought that if he were to try the ascent of the Cameroons Mountain, the attempt would not only afford him the practical knowledge he required, but would be also serviceable for geographical purposes, the glimpses that he would obtain from the various heights showing the character of the country.

After a successful ascent, Mr. Comber felt himself fully prepared to undertake what proved to be his first important journey. He started with seven men, and Mr. Wilson, belonging to the Mission, as interpreter and companion. They took provisions for a month, with goods to buy vegetables, &c., as well as plenty of tobacco, cloth, knives, spoons, beads, snuff-boxes, bells, whistles, looking-glasses, caps, shirts, rings, earrings, and the like, for presents. The direction taken was round the northern side of the base of the Cameroons Mountain, as far inland as Balombi-ba-Kotta, through the Bamboko country. The road was rough in the

extreme. One of the first places reached was Bomano. Going to the headman's house, he found a few people, who, on seeing the visitors, set up a wide-mouthed howl of laughter, and in great excitement unhooked the town drum and beat a general call, adding, to make "a concord of sweet sounds," their own voices. A boy rushed off to tell the headman who was away at his farm, and soon returned to fetch His Majesty's state apparel—regimental coat and hat—so that he might receive his guests in state. In about a couple of hours the king, whose name was Ilaley-Soko, appeared in full dress. After shaking hands, and accepting some snuff, Mr. Comber told him who his party were, that he was going from town to town through the country to tell "God-palaver," as the preaching of the Gospel is called. He expressed a wish that they would go no farther, but put up a house at his place, and live amongst his people. Mr. Comber replied that he was God's servant, and that He had sent him into the country, and therefore he must go; but that if God told him to put up a house at Bomano he would do it, for he had to act as God directed him. At first the people listened attentively to the preaching; but soon laughed heartily at all that was told them, as if they thought it a good story, but didn't believe it.

In a village a short distance from Bomano, called Deeonga, Mr. Comber saw the first idol he had seen in Africa—the rudest figure of a man, with arms crossed, and holding some fruit placed as an offering—the figure being in a little circle of small trees. At other places he saw the same kind of idol. As far as he could learn, it was a sort of household tutelary god, to whom the people did not pray or ascribe intelligence.

The people at a farther place, called Bosama, manifested great astonishment at being told of the resurrection of the dead. On being informed of Mr. Comber's name, which they wished to know, they

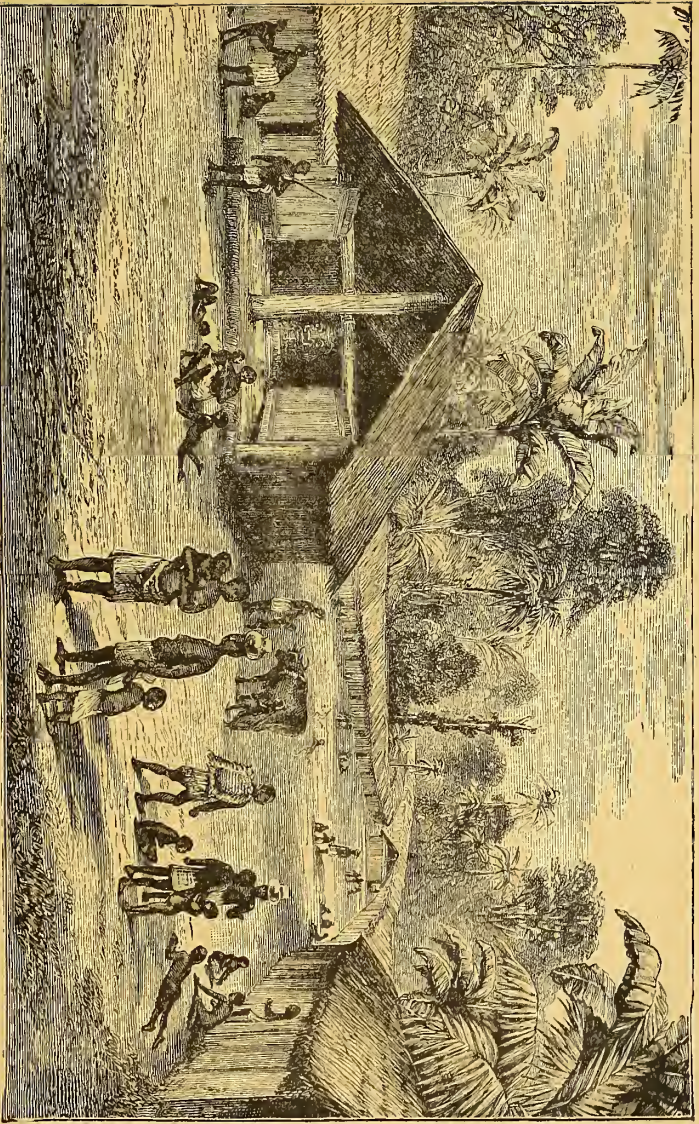
burst into roars of laughter, again and again renewed (probably because the sound was similar to many of their native names—Kombi, Koombi, Koombo, &c.). At Bosama Mr. Comber was able to sleep with more ease of mind and less apprehension than at Bomano, but the rats were very troublesome, eating a good bit of his shoes, and nibbling away at his men's toes, and squealing, scratching, scrambling, in the most uproarious style. This part of the journey had been traversed some time before by Mr. Thomson, but at Mweali the people had never seen a white man, consequently the amount of staring Mr. Comber was subjected to was "something awful," and, of course, as he remarks, most embarrassing to a nervous, modest man; while eating, there were some fifty or sixty natives watching every morsel as it went from his plate to his mouth. At this place, as elsewhere on the route, there was much displeasure expressed when the intention to proceed was announced.

At Boöba, the limit of the Bamboko country, he was able to gain some information of Bakundu, the place he wished particularly to reach. Being told that it was not very far distant, and could be reached by dark, he pushed forward with Mr. Wilson as his companion. But the distance was farther than was expected, and being overtaken by the darkness, they returned until the men were met coming on with their loads. A place was chosen for encampment, a fire lit, which it was difficult to keep blazing all night; but it was safe, as it was also safe to keep his rifle by his side in case any hungry leopard might stray that way. He was lulled, he says, to sleep, after committing himself and his attendants to the care and protection of his Heavenly Father, by the strange mingling of nightly sounds in a tropical forest—the whistling of the grasshoppers, the clack, clack of the huge bats, the shrill cry of the bush-dog, and all the innumerable voices of insects unknown.

Early next morning Bakundu was reached, Mr.

Comber being much impressed with the size of the place. On going to the headman's house, the people gathered in crowds, staring wonderingly and curiously at the first white man they had ever seen. The houses were observed to be large and strong, eighty-five being counted in one street, with many here and there behind. The population was estimated to be between 1000 and 1500. Here, Mr. Comber felt, was indeed a sphere of labour, all the people to hand, living in one place. He lifted up his heart to his great Master, asking Him to show him what to do. Intercourse with Mosaka, the king, was carried on under difficulty. A Bamboko man, who happened to be at Bakundu, and who understood the language, interpreted for Mr. Wilson, Mr. Wilson previously interpreting to the man what Mr. Comber himself wished to communicate. Besides the king there were four or five chief men. It was resolved to have in the evening a palaver with the king and the chief men in the presence of the people. At this palaver the advantages were put before them which it was hoped would result if a missionary were to come and live amongst them; their answer being substantially this—"The visitors had come so unexpectedly into the town; they were all frightened, never having seen a white man before; still, after the explanations that had been given, they were glad to see them, and liked the good word that had been spoken; and that they would very much like Mr. Comber to come and live in their town. Only, they were afraid of Calabar, and they would like Mr. Comber to come and see them once or twice more before they finally decided. They felt that the men were too old to learn book, but they thought it would be good for their children to learn." Mr. Comber replied that it was a long way, but he would try to come and see them again, and then they would be able to come to a decision.

Mr. Comber left Bakundu feeling that he had discovered a people amongst whom he might settle



RAKUNDU, WEST AFRICA. (From a Photograph.)

down, devoting himself to the work for which he had come to Africa. He was now anxious to ascertain the exact geographical situation of the place, and particularly its relation to the mountain, hoping to discover a route across it in the direction of Victoria. As he proceeded with his men along a canoe track—caused by the wooden rollers on which the canoes made in the bush had been conveyed to the river—he observed a wide sheet of water. On coming to the shore he ascertained from some natives that it was surrounded by land, and that opposite there was a town, Balombi-ba-Kotta, as large as Bakundu, that it was on an island in the middle of the lake. The people invited him to enter their canoes, but his men were not willing; and so, as he had found Bakundu, and was satisfied with the place as a probable mission station, he was not very desirous to visit Balombi-ba-Kotta. His efforts, however, to find a route to the mountain were unsuccessful, and eventually he returned to Victoria, mainly by the same way he had set out, resolving early next dry season to visit Bakundu again.

In the letter to the Society, in which the details of this important journey were fully and graphically given, Mr. Comber made the following earnest appeal:—“I do hope that, as there are likely to be many good openings such as there have never been before, the Society will accept every suitable offer to engage in the African service; and that Christians at home will remember that they owe all to Him who came to redeem them, and that they will seek for that peculiar satisfaction which follows giving money for Christ’s service. May ‘the Lord of the harvest send forth many labourers unto His harvest.’ As to the expenses of this journey, they will be about £18, I think.”

As may be readily imagined, Mr. Comber was anxious for the wet season to come to an end, so that he might attempt his next journey to Bakundu.

In the meantime, he carefully matured his plans against the return of the dry season, which would be in the month of November. Whilst making these preparations, he received important news from England to the effect *that £1000 had been given to the Society for a missionary exploration of the Congo*, and he thought it not unlikely that he might be one of the two individuals who would be chosen to undertake it. "If I do go," he wrote to his father, "all my attempts this side (so near a successful issue at present) will fall through; and the Congo or Kabenda will be the mission instead of Cameroons. Things look so hopeful for me here, that I am exceedingly loath to give this up. The matter may be all decided by the mail now expected. Stanley is not far away, and has come across Africa from the East. I trust he will meet with a good reception because of his bravery and energy. I wish I had resources at command something like his. It is easy getting in from East Africa from what it is here. There are caravan routes there, and clear tracks of other travellers."

The expected mail did not, however, bring any definite instructions relative to the Congo. That important matter being still under the consideration of the Home Committee, Mr. Comber was free to attempt his second proposed visit to Bakundu, or to go even beyond that place, to a country still farther in the interior, of which he had heard, where it might be even more suitable for him to settle. The fine Christian spirit with which he entered upon this journey will be seen in the sentiments he expressed to his friend John Hartland. "I am earnestly trusting the Lord will guide me aright into the carrying out of His plans for me. My first desire is to do my duty as His servant. I want to be found faithful, and I want success, because I want to succeed in the work my Father has given me to do. I trust I am His first—entirely and exclusively His, if He wants

to honour me by choosing me to absolute sacrifice, as far as the dearest relationships of life are concerned, for instance. I am glad to say I never feel any fear



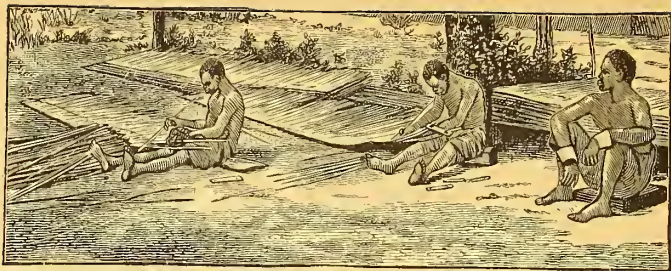
DON PEDRO V., KING OF CONGO.—*p.* 75.

or timidity, nor any hopelessness about anything, however difficult. Going among unknown tribes where white men are not known, I have sometimes felt a little apprehensiveness as they have yelled out to one another, beaten their drums loudly, and

crowded round me laughing, but I never feel any real fear. I know whose I am, and who is my Master, and am quite as ready to die as to live. Sometimes I think I don't feel things enough, that I think of carrying out duty too barely, if you can understand what I mean ; there is the work for me to do, and I seem to go at it without thinking of drawbacks, of my inefficiencies, and sometimes, I am afraid, throwing myself too little upon Divine help. The Lord graciously forgive the sins and faults and neglects of His sinful servant."

This second important journey was accomplished in twenty-one days, Mr. Comber proceeding by a branch of the Cameroons River called the Mungo, which he found to be navigable for over sixty miles, leaving it at a place named Malendi. From Malendi the route lay through thick forests, several large towns being passed. The lake discovered on the previous journey was of course an object of deep interest. It was now thoroughly explored ; the people on the island being visited. As the lake had no name in particular, and no other European had reached it, Mr. Comber determined to call it after his old friend and Sunday-school teacher—Lake Rickards. His reappearance in Bakundu occasioned much interest, and further information of the place and people was obtained. He returned to Victoria greatly encouraged with the results of his journey.

In closing this chapter, it may be stated that, whilst circumstances, as will be presently seen, did not allow Mr. Comber to settle down amongst the people of Bakundu, a mission station before long was founded there, where for years the Gospel has been proclaimed with tokens of Divine blessing



CHAPTER VI.

PIONEERING EXPEDITION TO SAN SALVADOR, CONGO LAND.

THE memorable discovery of the identity of the Congo and the Lualaba rivers made by Mr. Stanley, when with such heroic daring he effected a passage "through the Dark Continent," must ever prove a most influential factor in the redemption of Africa. But some three months before the world was startled by the announcement of that extraordinary feat, Mr. Arthington of Leeds, a gentleman deeply interested in the welfare of the natives of Africa, in an important communication to the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society, under date 14th May, 1877, directed attention to the country of the Congo. In that communication, Mr. Arthington referred to information he had received from Lieutenant Grandy, who had been intrusted with the Livingstone Congo Expedition—an expedition which entered Africa from the west coast. The interesting account given by that Christian officer of the religious state of the people at San Salvador, the capital of the Congo kingdom, which place he had visited, incited Mr. Arthington to suggest to the

Baptist Missionary Society the desirability of sending out a preliminary expedition with a view to missionary work; at the same time expressing the high and sacred pleasure it would afford him to defray the expenses which would be incurred. This offer was accompanied by a still more generous proposal should the expedition prove successful—viz., the presentation to the Society of a steamer for use on the Congo River.

After much careful inquiry, the Committee of the Society were thankful and glad to accept so noble a gift; and steps were forthwith taken with a view to its practical application. The two brethren invited to undertake the expedition were Mr. Grenfell and Mr. Comber,—no wiser choice could have been made; and the Society was indeed fortunate in having men already in Africa possessing in such a marked manner so many of the requisite qualifications.

It will be gathered from what has preceded that these brethren were not unaware of the movements at home, and of the probable wishes of the Committee with respect to themselves; so that when, on the 5th of January, 1878, definite instructions arrived requesting them to accept the undertaking, they were prepared to receive them, and were soon ready with their reply. Mr. Comber wrote thus:—

“Together with my brother, Mr. Grenfell, I read your important letter yesterday, and hasten to answer it.

“So long as the earnest and long cherished desire of my heart (to labour for Christ among the real heathen of the interior) can be carried out, I do not mind whether it be on the Congo, or interior of Cameroons.

“I must confess that I am a little bit sorry for Bakundu, having had my thoughts and sympathies centred on that place lately, fully expecting to go there, having chosen ground for house and schools, and made all arrangements with the people for my settlement amongst them; and I most earnestly hope

that that district, about sixty miles overland from the sea-coast, will receive attention in the future.

“But now I throw my whole heart and soul into the Congo Mission, and earnestly pray for health and strength of body to enable me to do the work there.

“I am very glad that San Salvador will be the understood basis of operations, and not the sea-coast; and after a year’s residence there, we shall soon see what the prospects of extension inland are.

“The Committee has kindly and courteously left the matter in our hands, as far as our own actions are concerned; but had the Committee expressed its wish for the immediate carrying out of its proposed arrangements, Mr. Grenfell and I would both have been ready at once to go down south, and make the preliminary reconnoitre, so saving the delay of writing home. However, I feel grateful for the kind consideration with which they have treated us.

“I am not my own, nor am I out here for my own purposes and ends; and in all my movements, especially in such a deeply important one as I feel this to be, I look up to the gracious Master to fulfil His promise, ‘I will guide thee with Mine eye,’ and to make all things work together for the everlasting good of souls, and His own eternal glory.”

Mr. Grenfell also wrote in similar strains.

Unfortunately, just at this critical time, Mr. Comber was afflicted with inflamed ulcers on his legs and feet; still, his general health was good, though during his residence on the west coast he had suffered from the usual fevers.

It was resolved to take a preliminary voyage down the coast to Banana. This resolve was wisely carried into effect. On arriving, a very helpful introduction was obtained to Mr. Bloeme, the manager of the large Dutch House, who very hospitably entertained the brethren, and sent them up to Embomma in the coasting steamer the *Zaire*. A few days before they had also been fortunate in meeting with the English

Consul, who singularly enough had brought back Lieutenant Grandy of the Livingstone Congo Expedition when he returned from the coast, and from whose personal knowledge of the country very important information was gained.

At Banana, Mr. Comber was greatly saddened by the terrible immoralities he witnessed. He thus refers to them in a letter he wrote to John Hartland:—"There are desperately shocking things occurring on the coast of Africa, of which none of you in England have any idea. Coomassie and Magdala on a small scale are not uncommon, neither are plunderings, murders, kidnapping, &c., and the state of morals among Portuguese and others is scarcely whisperable. Oh! it is awful, the amount of corruption and filth introduced by Europeans.

"The principal part of the imports discharged from our ship consisted of rum, gin, and powder; for one little place for instance 1200 cases of gin. Spirit is the curse of commerce out here."

The sentiments following this extract must be given, revealing as they do so much of Mr. Comber's inner life:—

"Well, I have been running on about West African society and manners, thinking it might interest you. I do not know what I can say about myself; if I were to keep anything in the shape of a journal, I fancy never would such a strange history, with so many variations of feeling be found, and I fear you know very little about me from the occasional letters I send you. Sometimes I write under depression of spirits, sometimes when they are full of life and effervescence, sometimes feeling sick and ill, and at other times strong and healthy. The climate has a strange influence over me. However, there are certain feelings, which are most pertinacious in clinging to me—whatever the present may bring, I am always strangely hopeful about the future in all respects. I, indeed, even hear Hope singing, 'It is

better farther on.' Failure now perhaps, success sure and certain soon; sickness now, but health and strength before; a closed path now, horrid darkness of sin and ignorance, hateful spirit of greed, avarice, and selfishness, abominable acts of cruelty and brutality; but the promises are so full and complete, and I look away from sickening sights, and barren hard soil, and feel like singing Isaiah's song, 'The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, the wilderness and solitary place shall be glad.' The Lord will 'hasten it in His time.'

"How are you getting on with Tennyson? Have you read the 'Idylls'? How great an admirer of simple duty Tennyson is. Duty, Honour, Purity, Faithfulness,—these are the virtues he extols, and sings about. I don't know any poetry so healthy as his. I always carry his works into the bush with me, in my roughest travelling, and many a long weary Sabbath (don't be shocked) has been enlightened by them, while lying in my hammock in some African hut. Read his 'Burial of the Duke of Wellington.'

'Not once or twice in our fair island story,
The path of duty was the path of glory.'

As the *Zaire* was running up to Musuka, the missionaries were able to proceed thither,—a place with a trading factory, about a hundred miles from the coast. At Musuka much valuable knowledge was obtained as to the route to San Salvador, the people of the country, carriers, &c. Necessary arrangements were also made with the Dutch trading house; and a letter translated into Portuguese was left for the King of San Salvador, who was expected, telling him who the missionaries were, and that it was their intention to visit him.

This trip was not only useful in regard to future movements, but it was also very beneficial to Mr. Comber; his health was greatly improved, and the small ulcers on his legs and feet entirely disappeared.

On their return to Cameroons, Mr. Comber and his

colleague devoted themselves to the maturing of their plans.

The demands of the situation did not, however, prevent him from writing to his brother, Percy ; in this letter the expression occurs : " I often think what a grand and honourable thing it would be if the Lord were to call us *all* to be missionaries—you, Carrie, Sid, and I." After stating this desire and hope, he bade his brother try for such an end by taking special care of his Christian character, by growing in grace, and in likeness to Jesus Christ. Should all this prove satisfactory, and his health be good, then he would not feel any hesitation in saying, " Come to Africa." He reminded him that it depended almost entirely upon himself. He bade him do as Sidney and as he himself had done—viz., to look forward to a missionary life as his great aim and desire, to expect it and prepare himself for it ; to live close to Jesus and be holy and strong in Him. He would have him study and strive hard to improve himself, because the more he would know, the more influence he would obtain, and the more good he would be able to do.

The preparations being as far as possible complete, on the 28th of June, 1878, in the steamship *Volta*, Mr. Comber and Mr. Grenfell proceeded a second time to the Congo, with the intention of making their way to San Salvador. Their party consisted of eight persons besides themselves—two teachers, Ebobu and Epea ; an Angola black, as Portuguese interpreter ; two Kroo boys, Jim and Joe ; a Cameroons boy from the mission, and two small boys, Ti and Cam ; mention must also be made of Jack, the donkey, and Mr. Grenfell's dog, Jip.

The eight days' passage down south to Banana was most pleasant, Mr. Comber never feeling better in his life. The party were very cordially received by Mr. Hankin, Mr. Bloeme's representative. As the *Zaire* was up river, it was determined to proceed in their own boat ; her powers being first well tested in the

channel. Mr. Comber started up the Congo, feeling very hopeful about everything, and how necessary it was to continue faithful to his Master and His work, and to abide in Him if the Divine blessing was to rest upon the undertaking.

Having reached Musuka, the point on the river at which the land journey begins, delay was occasioned by waiting for the carriers whom it was expected the king would send down from San Salvador. As these did not arrive, the party was increased to thirty-five by men from Musuka and neighbourhood. On the 30th of July the march began, headed by the "Kirangazi," a boy bearing the English flag. Mr. Comber found the country much depopulated by the slave trade of the Portuguese. The few rivers that had to be passed gave no trouble except to "Jack," who proved himself a most useful animal. There was no difficulty in procuring food; a sheep or goat or pig being killed every day, the Congo people eating entrails and even the skin, which they cut up and boiled. The greatest physical difficulty in travelling, owing to the narrowness of the path, was the tall, thick grass, reaching in many places fifteen feet in height.

After proceeding some distance, the men sent by the king were met, numbering about fifty; it was, however, thought advisable that they should go on to the river and bring up the goods left behind. The distance from Musuka to San Salvador was found to be about a hundred miles; and, after eight days' travelling, the party reached its destination, being heartily received by the king and the people of the town. This reception took place in the king's courtyard. "Pedro Finga," in the words of Mr. Comber, "introducing us to His Majesty, went down upon his knees, and seemed struck with awe and reverence; and most of those who interviewed His Majesty rubbed dust on their foreheads, and clapped hands long and vigorously. We found Don

Pedro or Totola, as he is called by his people, sitting outside his house, his chair placed on an old piece of carpet. Taking off our hats as we approached, we shook hands with the king and inquired after his welfare. He placed chairs for his English guests and seemed glad to see us."

On a large Baobab tree Grandy's initials were observed, which were cut when he was on his way to find Livingstone; underneath, the missionaries inscribed, "G. G., '78," and "T. J. C., '78." It may here be stated that Congo was discovered by the Portuguese in the year 1484; that very soon after the discovery emissaries from the Roman Catholic Church were sent forth to establish the catholic faith; that the chief town of Congo Land was named San Salvador; the then king was baptised, and that, in course of time, a cathedral, churches, a convent, and a monastery, were built. In less than fifty years, however, in consequence of other discoveries, the importance of San Salvador declined; and, on the retirement of the Jesuits, the people of San Salvador readily threw off the nominal Christianity which, against their will, had been imposed upon them, and showed their hostile feeling towards the invaders by demolishing the religious edifices they had erected. The Portuguese Government did not, however, relinquish its hold upon the country; and at the recent Berlin conference, the territorial rights of Portugal, as extending up to the south bank of the Congo, and reaching over a considerable region inland, including San Salvador, were formally recognised.

Although for many years no efforts had been made on behalf of the people in San Salvador by the Roman Catholic Church, the movements of the English Baptist Missionary Society did not escape her ever-watchful eyes; the consequence was that on their arrival the missionaries found that a Jesuit father, Padre Lazaro, had preceded them and was duly established.

As their main object in visiting San Salvador was not so much to settle down in that town, as to find a base of operations for future work on the Upper Congo River, the presence of this padre at first greatly strengthened their determination to proceed elsewhere. But, in private interviews with the king, they were assured of Don Pedro's protection, and were urged to remain; and during their residence in the town, which extended over three weeks, they were able to make inquiries and observations which tended to impress them more favourably with San Salvador as a desirable place for the founding of a mission station, ever, however, keeping in view the ulterior object of reaching the Upper Congo. Whilst they were at San Salvador, trading parties had passed through the town on their way to the coast,—some of these came from a place called Makuta. Having ascertained that Makuta was in the right direction for the Upper Congo, and near the Babwende tribe of whom Mr. Stanley had spoken so highly, the missionaries resolved to make an effort to reach that place. At first the king was opposed; but being assured that their intention was simply to reach the river, he consented to supply them with the necessary carriers. On this journey Mr. Comber was fortunate in securing the services of Matoka, a San Salvador man, who had accompanied Lieutenant Grandy on his expedition, and from whom he had received a most satisfactory testimonial. Their route lay through several small towns—at Moila they were greatly tried by the refusal of the carriers to proceed to Makuta; and, as all entreaty failed, there was nothing to be done but to pay them and let them return. The chief of Moila, however, was friendly, and replenished their staff. Four days' subsequent march brought them to Tungwa, the largest of the Makuta towns, containing 2000 inhabitants, being more populous than San Salvador. Two ambassadors, one of them being Matoka, were sent forward

to inform the King of Makuta of their approach ; and for what purpose they wished to pass through his country. Mr. Comber and his colleague were greatly encouraged by the favourable report with which the ambassadors returned. The king was willing to see them ; but curious to know what they really wanted. "What do the white men want every day coming to my country? Let them come and see me." Such was his message. It should be here observed that no white man had ever been in Tungwa. The king had probably heard of Stanley from some of his neighbours ; and Grandy, the only other white man who could be in question, had not been permitted to enter the town.

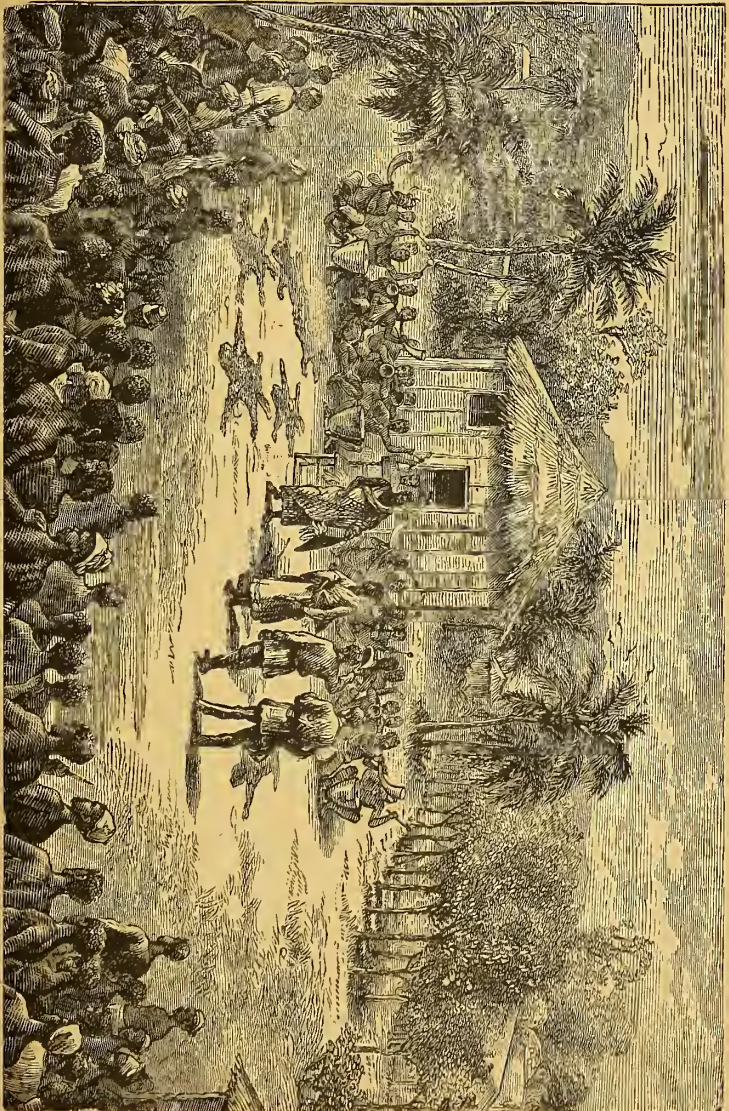
We can imagine the feelings of delight with which Mr. Comber received this permission to proceed. As he heard from the brow of the hill the sounds of the welcoming drums in the town below, such preparations as could be made were speedily effected, "the carriers donning their best bit of cloth and finery, and our own Cameroons boys putting on clean shirts." The description of the reception must be given in Mr. Comber's own graphic style :—

"As we strode down the hill and crossed the river, which is about twenty feet wide and from two to six feet deep, more of the inhabitants gathered about us, curious and fearless, but not impertinent, and we followed our good friend Matoka into the centre of the town, and found that the people were in a great state of excited curiosity. Some hundreds formed a half-circle at the front of the house, under the eaves of which we sat, and they were eagerly pressing upon one another, and gazing at us with that intense wondering gaze which I had before encountered in interior Cameroons. One fine-looking old woman especially interested me, who took her pipe from her mouth, and looked at us long and silently, with piercing eyes and half-opened mouth ; and this old woman was nearly always amongst the crowd, constantly sitting at a

respectful distance from our tent, during the four days of our stay at Tungwa. It was interesting and pleasant, too, to see the frequent family resemblances between one and another, a thing I had not noticed before in Africa, except among a few Cameroons families. But most interesting were the children. Some half-a-dozen boys, about eight to twelve years of age, with frank, open faces, bright lustrous eyes, and well-formed heads, I became quite attached to, and longed to have the task of teaching and training into disciples of Christ. We found these boys to be very quick and intelligent when we tried to teach them.

“After waiting about half-an-hour, the son of the Soba made his appearance, dressed in a red and black plaid wound round his body and over his shoulders, a military coat, and a military cocked hat. He advanced slowly to the sound of drums and bugles, his people forming an avenue at his approach. When he reached within a dozen paces, he stepped briskly forward from the umbrella held over him, and lifting his hat, and making a good bow, shook hands with us. He had come to conduct us to the Soba, his father, by whom we were grandly received; indeed, in a more stately and striking manner than by the King of Congo. He was sitting on a bamboo native chair, dressed much in the same style as his son, and was surrounded by musicians. He rose from his seat on our approach and advanced to meet us, while his band made such a deafening noise that our efforts to speak to him were in vain. The musical instruments consisted of some large drums, about six cornets and bugles, and seven ivory horns: these horns were each of a whole tusk, and gave forth very softened sweet sounds. As he had nothing but leopard skins to offer us to sit upon, and the music was almost too much, we retired, asking him to visit us in our tent. This he did, with his son, soon after, when we explained why we had come. He thought we were traders and had come

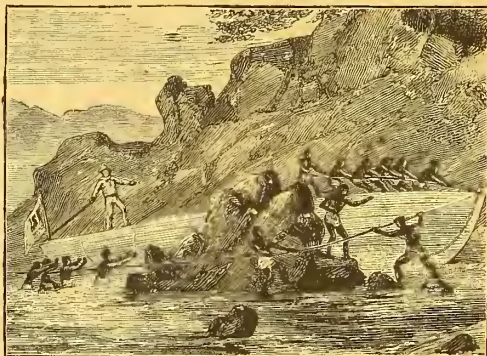
RECEPTION OF THE MISSIONARIES BY THE KING OF NAKUTA.

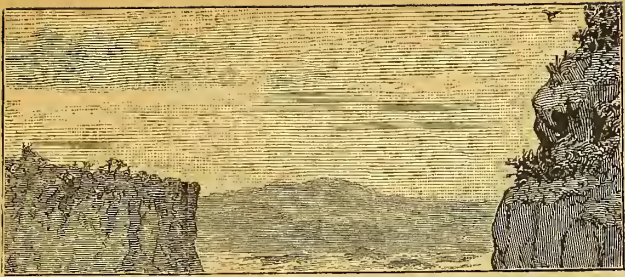


from Ambriz to buy his ivory, and seemed scarcely to believe us when we said we had never bought a single tusk, and only wanted to teach black men what was good. He had had no experience of missionaries before."

Though the King of Makuta was thus favourably disposed, it was fully evident that he would afford no facilities for proceeding farther into the interior, toward the Upper Congo. His consent and assistance being thus withheld, there was no alternative except for the missionaries to return, which they did, arriving in due course at San Salvador, much to the gratification of Don Pedro and his people.

The objects of the preliminary expedition being now attained, Mr. Comber determined to proceed to England, to lay the results of his researches before the Home Committee, and advise with them as to the future movements of the Congo Mission. Upon this determination he accordingly acted, reaching England about the middle of November.





CHAPTER VII.

HIS FIRST RETURN TO ENGLAND.

THE arrival of Mr. Comber in this country, as will be readily understood, excited feelings of no ordinary interest. No one can have read the previous pages without perceiving how strong were the ties of affection binding him to his relatives and personal friends. The home circle had indeed lost much when it lost the gentleness of his presence, the advantage of his good common-sense, and the influence of his earnest devotion. In depth of nature, kindly considerateness, and prudent counsels, he had been almost more than son, and more than brother. And beyond the home many had been the true and noble friendships he had formed. When "Tom Comber" therefore came back from Africa, warm indeed was the welcome he received.

But an interest attached to this home-coming extending far wider than immediate relatives and friends, and an interest necessarily over and above that generally connected with the return of missionaries—for had not Mr. Comber been sent forth where no other missionaries had gone; had he not been in parts where no white men had ever travelled; and

was there not weighty importance belonging to his journeyings arising out of recent African discoveries—particularly those of Stanley; and now that the expedition with which he had been intrusted had proved so successful, was not a new mission field opening up for the operations of the Society with which he was identified? It is not surprising therefore that, when his arrival in England in November, 1878, was announced, urgent applications, far more numerous than could possibly be complied with, were sent to the Mission House requesting his presence at missionary meetings.

Perhaps there were no individuals, outside his home circle, who were more ready to greet him than his much-loved friend John Hartland and the members of the children's class at Camden Road. We do not wonder that, at the very first weekly meeting which took place after his return, he should have been present, and presided as in the former days. The sacred happiness of that re-gathering, with so many young people in whose spiritual welfare he had taken an anxious interest, must be imagined rather than described.

Much of Mr. Comber's time was, of course, occupied in consultations with the Officers and Committee of the Society, in relation to the further development of the Congo Mission. It was not his desire to remain for more than a few months at home; consequently what had to be done in the way of preparation for future operations had to be done with vigour. One matter especially pressing was the necessity of securing suitable helpers. Mr. Grenfell having returned to Cameroons, it was of the utmost urgency that reinforcements should be obtained. It was resolved that Mr. Comber should be accompanied by at least two, and if possible by more than two colleagues. This resolution was made known to the churches, and as the result, three young men volunteered their services—Mr. W. Holman Bentley, Mr. H. Crudgington, and

Mr. Comber's old friend, Mr. John Hartland. All three were accepted.

As it was in consequence of Mr. Comber's influence John Hartland was led to offer himself as a missionary for the Congo, it is fitting that reference be made in these pages to that offer in particular. A powerful impression had been produced upon Mr. Hartland's mind by the letters he had received from Africa; but it was at a meeting of the Young Men's Missionary Association held in the Mission House, which Mr. Comber addressed soon after his return, and as the result of his appeals on that occasion, that John Hartland definitely resolved, if God would open his way, to go to the Congo.

"The same evening," says his mother, "immediately on his return home, he wrote to Mr. Comber asking him if his address was specially intended for him. It seemed so. For years, long before they met, his castle in the air was to be a missionary,—it had always been his hope, yet it seemed too great a calling—too far off—too unattainable ever to hope for." In his letter to his friend he thus expressed his fervent desire:—

"Often, very often, the voice has called from afar, 'Come over and help us.' I have longed, I have prayed to go, and often cried, 'Here am I; send me,' but I have never yet felt that He *was* sending me, and I dare not go alone. But to-night you said you wanted to take with you back to Africa one or two men at once. The preparation for mission work was always my obstacle, but if the men you need are ready to dedicate themselves *as they are*, and at once to the Lord's service—if the only preparation needed is the preparation of the Holy Spirit; if the wisdom needed is that wisdom promised to those who ask; if the sufficiency is not a college education, but the sufficiency which is of God—I cannot, I dare not hold back. 'How much owest thou my Lord?' often rings in my ears, and my only answer is 'Everything.'

I am not my own, I am bought with a price, and He who gave His life for me can claim me all His own. I am ready to go where He wills, even should it be to pain and death.

‘Take my life and let it be,
Only, wholly, all for Thee.’

“My mind is fully made up, that if you will accept me (and you know what I am, I have no need to introduce myself to you), as a fellow-helper in the Lord’s work, and if the Society will take me as one of their workers, I am ready *this* day to consecrate myself to the Lord.

“This is the way in which I humbly trust to ‘test’ the call I hear in my heart so loudly. Just as I am, with all I have I offer myself to the Lord for His work. If you and the Society accept, I shall feel it *is* His call, and come what will, I will obey the voice of God, and serve Him as He commands me.”

Great was Mr. Comber’s joy on receiving this letter. He knew that his friend, though he had not enjoyed the advantages of a college training, possessed the qualifications which were most requisite. And because of the possession of those qualifications, and not merely because of his personal attachment to him, he urged a prompt application to the Society. John Hartland followed the advice, and his application was thankfully accepted.

On the 10th of February, the year being 1879, Mr. Comber was invited to read a paper on his explorations inland from Mount Cameroons and journey through Congo to Makuta, before the members of the Royal Geographical Society, which paper may be found in the Society’s monthly records of that date. The paper was well received. Captain Burton said his first duty was personally to thank Mr. Comber for having found his bottle. (A bottle the captain had deposited on the occasion of his own ascent of the mountain.) He thought he had made a most interesting journey, and had brought

back a considerable amount of new information. The lake described was previously unknown. With regard to Mr. Comber's journey to the Congo, it was very important, especially in connection with the proposed ulterior proceedings of missionary bodies. Sir Rutherford Alcock expressed himself as much indebted to Mr. Comber, affording, as his paper did, much encouragement in many respects. In moving a vote of thanks, the president observed that nothing could be more hopeful or satisfactory than the almost idyllic picture which had been drawn, by Mr. Comber's able pen, of a country which, he trusted, was destined to become the theatre of his successful labours.

Many and urgent as were the claims upon his thought and time, Mr. Comber would not permit his brother Percy's birthday to pass by without sending the following affectionate remembrance of it :—

“MY DEAR BROTHER,—I quite expected to be able to write you a letter yesterday, where I was preaching, but found the time did not belong to me, so write now, though I am afraid this letter will be late. I am very sorry, as I can imagine you were hoping to have a letter from me this morning. Once more, I wish you ‘many very happy returns of the day.’ I feel very thankful, my dear brother, both for what you are and for what I hope and expect you will be. Our Heavenly Father has wonderfully blessed us three boys, with our sister also; and we ought to be very thankful. Especially that we have been brought to know, love, and serve Him. How differently we have been placed to so many you doubtless see about you (your shop companions, for instance), being brought up, as we have been, under strong religious influences, and *naturally* becoming followers of the blessed Master, Christ. I am thankful that you are a Sunday-school teacher too, and I earnestly pray that you may be able to do some-

thing for the Master in your class and at your meetings. May He fit and prepare you for greater work.

“And then, Percy, see how He has guided all three of us to think about mission work, so that we are choosing a life of great and honourable service. I love my work so dearly, am so proud of it, and would not give it up for anything; and I could send you no better birthday wish than that you may be called to the same work. It will indeed be glorious if you, Sid, and I are all working in the future in the same field, and I fully expect and earnestly hope it will be so. Stage by stage I have been led to it, and as you, dear Percy, covet and strive after it, look forward to it, and try hard to fit yourself for it. I am sorry to have been so busy as to do so little for you—in writing to you and helping you. I have often, however, left you in confidence in God’s hand; and besides this, I have been glad that you have had Sid’s help and guidance. But my time seems more and more fully occupied, and I can’t do for you what I once could. But, keeping close to Christ, you, dear Percy, will get on, I am sure of it. Find a place in your new year’s motto for this thought, ‘Closer to Christ,’ and pray that it may be so also with me.

“Directly after finishing this letter, I shall kneel in earnest prayer—specially, to-night, for my brother Percy. God bless you.—From your ever affectionate brother,
TOM.

“P.S.—I hope you will find the books useful to you.”

On the 4th of April, the early attachment he had formed was consummated by his marriage to Miss Minnie Rickards, the daughter of his much-esteemed Sunday-school teacher. Thus a dream of his boyhood became a reality. The marriage ceremony was performed by Dr. Clifford, in Westbourne Park Chapel, and being the first wedding in that sanctuary,

the minister, as is customary in such circumstances, presented the happy couple with a copy of the Word of God.

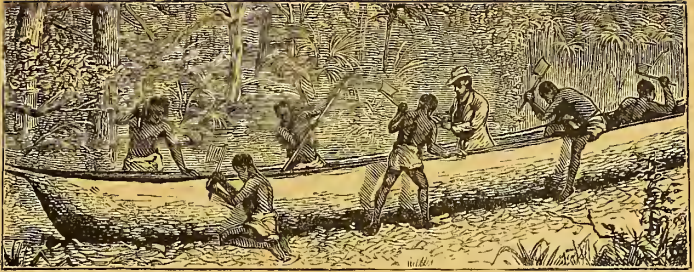
The time was now drawing near for the departure of the Congo band. Many friends desiring an opportunity at which they might publicly bid the missionaries "God-speed," on the 23rd of April the large hall of the Cannon Street Hotel was secured for the purpose; but so great were the numbers attending that both the large and the pillar halls were in request, and were crowded. Mr. Tritton, in presiding, spoke, as was his wont, with much spiritual beauty and power. In the course of his observations, he remarked, with solemn emphasis:—"Disappointments may await our brethren and ourselves; and trials neither few nor small. Africa has had her martyrs. She may have them again. There are graves of the saints in Africa. More such may be opened yet. But come what may, there is a sense in which our brethren will be, in that land, not as captives, but as freemen of the Lord, themselves preaching deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Amongst other speakers was Dr. Stanford. He had been asked, as his pastor, to introduce Mr. Comber. "I am told," he said, "that I am to introduce my friend and brother, Thomas Comber. But he needs no introduction from me. You all know him quite well. He answers to what a missionary to Africa should be. A man going on this mission to Africa should be a man. He should have the genius for peace. He should have a head well screwed on. He should have a clear, calm common-sense. He should have in him the very patience of a lamb of God. You know we want souls to work, and not to be faint or to be discouraged. And our Comber is that man; and he is going to Africa, not on a scientific expedition, nor (if I may use the words of the last-made cardinal) going with the idea of translating Plato into

the language of the Hottentots. He is simply going to preach Jesus, and not to preach Him exactly in the style of Chalmers, or of Robert Hall, or of the Bampton lecturers, but rather of Philip the Evangelist, about whom we read in the first missionary chronicles that, as he was driven into the wilderness along with one of the black men, he opened his mouth and preached to him Jesus. And I hope Comber will do that ; and I am confident he has, so far as we dare to say of any one, the Divine credentials : yet I feel that it is an act of faith for him to go, and an act of faith on our part to let him go. If it were not for the grand imperial promise, 'Lo! I am with you always,' it would be an act of fantastic folly. But we have that promise, and we dare to send him with all power on his side, having the Saviour with him."

Great was the effect when the veteran, Alfred Saker, rose to address the meeting. The appearance of the worn missionary, the remembrance of his long years of heroic service, gave a charm—a magic power—to his words of tender sympathy and wise counsel. Much regret was felt at the absence of Dr. Moffat, who had intended to be present.





CHAPTER VIII.

EVENTS AND PROCEEDINGS PREVIOUS TO REACHING STANLEY POOL.

THE voyage out was exceptionally successful and pleasant: good weather, calm seas, specially beautiful nights, and splendid health nearly all the time. The *Volta* was exchanged for the *Congo* at Teneriffe, on which island six donkeys and a tiny foal were purchased for carrying purposes, and Mr. Comber had also hoped to have obtained there two cows. The little donkey being very lively and skittish, afforded some amusement. It had been bought for a dollar, and so was called "Dollar." Mr. Comber would sometimes trot him "aft" to see Mrs. Comber. It was just small enough to run through his legs without knocking him over. Besides the donkey live-stock, there were two dogs—a large-sized Newfoundland-retriever, and a good colley or shepherd's dog, with a particularly beautiful face. Whilst on board, Mr. Comber spent considerable time in reading up and practising in "nautical astronomy," so that he might be able accurately to take the sun for latitude and longitude. To Mr. Baynes, the Secretary of the Society, he wrote off Sierra Leone:—"We are

a very happy party on board the *Congo*—happy in our successful voyage, in our glorious prospects for the future, and in our intercourse with one another. We had a very delightful and strengthening service on board last Sunday, when we partook of the ‘Lord’s Supper’ together. And every day we are able to meet in the ‘Ladies’ Saloon’ for prayer. I think all our hearts are light and joyous, and we feel with Anna Waring—

‘My hopes I cannot measure.’

I trust that every report we have to make may be as cheering and as full of thankfulness as this.”

On the *Congo* calling at Cameroons, Mr. Comber was able to secure the Cameroons contingent. Arriving there, he heard the important news that Mr. Stanley was shortly to enter Africa from the mouth of the Congo, and to go up to the Pool, for the purpose of establishing trading stations along the banks of the river. Important, however, as this news was, he felt that it would not affect the Mission plans of planting a base station at San Salvador, and a station, if possible, at Makuta, from which to press on to the Pool above the Falls.

On the evening of the 9th of June, Banana was reached—six weeks and two days after leaving Liverpool. The day following, Mr. Bentley and Mr. Hartland started in a schooner for Boma; and the second day an “express canoe” was despatched to Musuka with a letter to the King of Congo to be forwarded by an “express courier” to San Salvador, informing His Majesty of the arrival of the missionary party, and asking for carriers. Mr. Comber and the rest of the party left at Banana were conveyed up to Musuka by the *Zaire*. It was thought advisable to make the journey to San Salvador in two detachments. The advance party, consisting of Mr. Bentley and Mr. Crudgington, thirty-six carriers, two *capatas*, four donkeys, and the dog “Ben,” duly reached their desti-

nation in safety and health, being well received by the king, who ordered a salute of fifty guns. The rear party accomplished their journey with equal success and were as cordially welcomed.

But, not many days had elapsed after their settlement at San Salvador, when a most terrible trial overtook the missionary band in general, and Mr. Comber in particular. It was nothing less than the death of Mrs. Comber, which most sorrowful event happened on the morning of Sunday, the 24th of August. The sad circumstance is most pathetically described in the following extracts from a letter John Hartland wrote to his mother :—

“ I am sure you will be as sorry to get this letter as I am to write it. It contains bad news. I may as well tell it at once, though it will come very suddenly to you. .

“ Our dear brother Comber has lost his young wife ! Poor Mrs. Comber has passed away ! It will seem very sudden to you, no doubt ; it was sudden to us too. She died of meningitis, an inflammation of the membrane of the brain, brought on by bad news from home. She was just recovering from a rather severe attack of fever, had not been able to get up, but expected shortly to do so. When the letters, our long and anxiously looked for letters arrived, Mr. Comber gave her those directed to her, and on coming into the room a few minutes later, found her sitting up in bed crying.

“ While we had been enjoying our good news from home, she had been reading of the serious, almost hopeless illness of her sister Lottie. The bad news seemed to take hold of her ; the next day she was much worse, and vomited all she took. Many bad symptoms appeared, and at first it was thought she had typhoid fever ; but soon coma set in, and for several days she lay quite unconscious, and only took nourishment from a spoon with which Tom fed her. They knew it could not be typhus, and Harry (Mr.

Crudgington) suggested that the symptoms were all those of meningitis, the most fatal of brain fever. For a day we hoped against Harry's diagnosis, but the next day Tom fell in with his ideas. All day, Saturday, she lay unconscious, Tom feeding her with beef-tea, eggs, and such things. All night Tom and Harry sat up with her. On Sunday she looked better, when I saw her at 6 A.M., but at 6.45, when Tom was alone with her, the breathing became slower, and, with a few sighs, her soul passed away to its rest.

"Sunday was a sad day to us; Bentley was ill with bilious fever. Tom did not come out of his house all day; but first prepared his dead wife for the grave, and then afterwards sat beside her, and you can imagine how deeply he grieved for her. I believe they loved each other most affectionately, and it is indeed a great and terrible bereavement to him, but he bears it bravely.

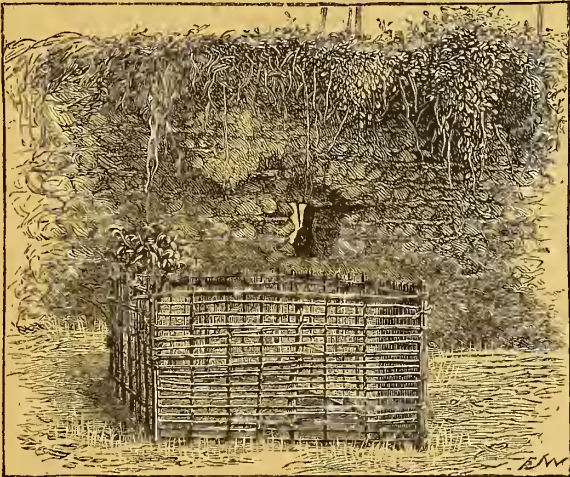
"Harry and I prepared the coffin, after Epea had made it out of some planks that only came up the day before. We lined it with white cloth, making a bed and pillow, and cut out a frill to put round it; it looked very nice indeed. We also made a grass and evergreen wreath to lay on the top. We were obliged to put her in the coffin the same day; but the funeral was not till the next morning. The grave was dug not far from the site of the house we are going to build.

"The next morning the sad train left the house for the grave. The white coffin, covered with a white pall, and surmounted with green leaves, was carried by four of the Mission people. Mr. Crudgington led the way, then followed Tom and I as chief mourners, Mr. Bentley and a Mr. Aston, a Birmingham trader, then the Mission people, followed by a general crowd led by the King of Congo himself. At the grave, into which large plantain leaves were laid, we all took our places, the people keeping off at a respectful distance. The service (one we had arranged among

ourselves) was read, partly by Mr. Crudginton and partly by myself. We sang 'We shall part but not for ever,' and some other hymns; prayer was offered, and then we left Epea to fill up the grave. The whole was so solemn and impressive, but yet very simple.

"The people kept wonderfully quiet and attentive all the time.

"After the funeral, the day passed very sadly and gloomily, and so have the following days; for we miss



THE GRAVE OF MRS. COMBER. (*From a Photograph.*)

her very much. You cannot think what a loss she is to us all, and how we miss her bright, cheerful face, her merry laugh and her kind gentle voice; but she has gone from the noblest service on earth to join the hosts of His servants who serve Him above, and is now in the presence of the King, and we may not wish her back.

"Poor Tom bears up most bravely, though his loss is most severe, and at times when he thinks of her in

that glorious land where they see His face, and where are gathered all the servants of God who have gone on before, and have entered into rest, he cannot help with the far-famed dreamer of Bedford wishing himself amongst them."

Mr. Comber's personal loss was rendered additionally keen by the sympathy he felt for his wife's friends.

"I am very anxiously waiting," he wrote to Mr. Rickards, "for your letters in answer to mine of August, and shall be very glad when they come. In many troubles of boyhood and youth, you have sustained, encouraged, and advised me, and taught me to look above, and I have sadly wanted you in this climax of trouble, which has come upon me in early manhood, and have often wished I could occupy a place in the sacred circle of your home, and could join in your Sunday evening worship; but the life I have chosen gives me the arm of the Heavenly Father alone to lean upon, and Faith needs to be stronger than with you in England.

"I can't tell you yet what effect my sorrow has had upon me, my spirit and life. I know that heaven is more attractive, and the thought of death more pleasant; and I think I am more earnest in my work; but I do so sadly miss my darling wife. I sometimes feel I can scarcely bear it, and don't know what to do. But the 'Very Present Help in Trouble' has been near, and my times of bursting grief have been times when Jesus has been nearest to me, and the consolations of His love very precious. Yet I can't say I am contented in spirit, although I believe that He does all for the best.

"The strong tie always existing between my old teacher and myself, became the closest and strongest possible when he yielded to my care his 'dear little girl;' and it brought me in close intimacy with others of his family, who for their own worth, as well as for Minnie's sake, became dear to me. I hope that

this tie will not now loosen. I should wrong my dearest earthly friend if I thought it would be so with you ; but I want to be loved as a son and a brother, and treated as such by the others, although I have been the means of bringing sorrow into your circle ; and I hope that my now lonely life, all the lonelier after the brief companionship of my darling, will have the occasional gleam of earthly sunshine which a letter from one of your household will give. In the letters written to Minnie and reaching here since her passing away, I have been very glad to read affectionate messages to me.

“You are, I know, anxious to hear about our work here, and in this letter I will tell you something of it ; but I must send you a beautiful passage from Martineau’s ‘Endeavours after the Christian Life,’ which I have come across to-day. I have been wanting to explain why anything connected with Minnie, any reference to her in talk or writing, although making my loss all the more keenly vivid, yet is pleasant to me. To read her letters that have come from you has been an occupation eagerly sought ; although it has made me feel the loss more. Martineau puts the feeling into words thus:— ‘Will a true heart say that an affection is evil because it is sad, and wish to shake it off the moment it brings pain? Call it what you will, *that* is not love, which itself is anxious to grow cold ; the emotions of a faithful soul never entertain a suicidal purpose and plan their own extinction ; rather do they reproach their own sensibility and passionately pray for a greater vitality. Whether, then, in joy or regrets, let the spirit of affection stay ; and if that spirit stay, the objects, though vanished, *leave their best presence* with us still. No, that is only lost truly which we have ceased to love.’”

It will be seen from the above sentiments how bravely and submissively Mr. Comber desired to bear his great sorrow. He determined to try and do his

work faithfully and cheerfully. He would work, the Lord helping him, as she who had been taken would have had him work; consequently, a week after her death, with Mr. Hartland as his companion, he started upon the proposed journey for Makuta. It was attended with many difficulties, and, as far as any permanent settlement was concerned, was most disappointing. As a specimen of Mr. Comber's manner of keeping rough notes, as well as for the information supplied, the following will be read with interest:—

“Tuesday, 9th September.—Carriers won't start—stay all day—can't get other carriers, and these won't return; they say they will wait.

“Wednesday, 10th.—Still here (Kola); carriers seem afraid to go on, and take their pay for one day, speaking of returning; but they don't return. Mr. Hartland has fever again (yesterday, ague). Soba brings bullets (three square pieces of iron roughly smelted), saying that Susu-Mpemba had sent them to him on our behalf. I say we will wait for Matoka, but try to arrange ambassadors to go to Tungwa, feeling that the people won't like to see us without our first sending ambassadors. Sent off Cozinheiro, Cam, and Sabbi (Cam to carry cloth and see it delivered to Susu-Mpemba, as I cannot trust the others). Fear that present sent by first ambassadors did not reach the chiefs. Our fresh ambassadors start at 3.30, and may be able to return to-night, as it is only about five miles. Ambassadors do not return. Latitude (from observation) $5^{\circ} 42' 28''$. (Vega.)

“Thursday, 11th.—Cam returns with Sabbi at 7.30. Says that others were afraid to enter Tungwa, saying that Susu-Mpemba would shoot them. Cam answers, ‘Never mind; suppose they do. Let us go.’ They wanted him to give up the present into the hands of a stranger to convey to Susu-Mpemba, but acting upon my instructions Cam refuses. Cozinheiro, afraid to return, they say, has gone to Congo by

another road ; and Sabbi lays all the blame on his companion (of course !). Cannot understand what the state of affairs really is, but prepare to go myself to Tungwa ; and having put a little food together, set out at eight o'clock, accompanied by Cam and Sabbi (under compulsion). Sabbi tries to linger and get out of it, but Cam goes behind, and I in front, and I promise Sabbi a good dash. Hartland left in charge of goods. N., N.N.E., and N.E. for two hours walking, Cam and Sabbi almost off their legs, and at ten o'clock arrive at Tungwa. Town looks larger and prettier than before. The prettiest African town I have ever seen. Cam says 'it pass [is better than] all other towns.' Half way there we meet Cozinheiro, who after all did not return to Congo, but was hanging about near. He says he has been into the town this morning, and that Susu-Mpemba declares that the cloth we sent to him was delivered as coming from the King of Congo, and not from us.

"Cross the Tungwa River and enter town without opposition, but without welcome. A few uninfluential people meet us and accompany us as we walk to our former camping place. Seat myself on stool outside house, and presently the chief Sengeli (Susu-Mpemba's father) passes at a little distance, waving his hands in perplexity and trouble. Wait half-an-hour and shake hands with a few people, and then eat my breakfast. About eleven Susu-Mpemba and his elder brother Antonio come. The former shakes hands, the latter won't until persuaded by my continuously offered hand with frequent 'Simba-ngeye' (Take, friend !). Both these brothers have whitish hair, and must be about fifty, and Sengeli must be seventy. Susu-Mpemba's son (a lad about sixteen) is an interesting, fine-looking young fellow. Both the brothers seem perplexed and troubled at seeing me, and none of the former state is displayed (hat, umbrella, music, &c.). Follow them to the palaver tree, and about 200 people circle round us. I tell the

chiefs, through Cozinheiro, how I have returned according to promise, that others are with me, that we are living at San Salvador, and that we sent four ambassadors (Sabbi being one) with a present for Susu-Mpemba, and one for Bwaka-Mata (a chief beyond). I have now come to visit him ; not to sleep in his town unless he wishes. The truth about our former ambassadors now leaks out. The present we sent to Bwaka-Mata was appropriated in part by the King of Congo, and in part by the ambassadors ; while that for Susu-Mpemba was delivered in the name of the King of Congo. They all seemed disgusted and angry at the petty treachery, and speak wrathfully about Totola, King of Congo ; but were most angry with Sabbi, the ambassador (as representing the King of Congo), for his deception, and also because he has brought us to Tungwa again. They shower invective upon him, and the chiefs spit at his face and draw their hands significantly across their throats. One man runs at him with a stick, and another takes up his gun. I protect Sabbi with my arm, and observe that, as he drinks some water from a bottle close by, he is in a profuse perspiration from terror. Cozinheiro explains that they want to kill him, and I rise and plead that it is not altogether his fault ; that he acted under other instructions. After more than three hours' palaver, during which they frequently retire for consultation, I am told that, much as they would personally like to see me, our coming before had brought them into so much trouble with neighbouring chiefs, who said Susu-Mpemba was always calling the white man to his town (the said white man wanting to take the country), that we must not come. Also that I must not keep saying all over the country that Susu-Mpemba was my friend, because this statement was always bringing him into trouble. They say little, however to me ; but threaten strongly Sabbi, and with much vociferation, put a bullet into his hand to bear to Totola, saying

that, if he sends any more ambassadors to Makuta on behalf of white men, their throats will be cut and they thrown into the river.

“As to going farther into the country by the Makuta road, they say we may try Zombo or Kin-suka, but must not come their way, because of the opposition of surrounding chiefs. And when I direct Cozinheiro to say that we hope soon to be widely known as benevolent, kind missionaries only, and not as traders, or as coming to take their country, and that, perhaps, then they would like us to come and settle in their town and teach them God’s Word, I understand enough of Fyot to know he does not give my message. He refuses, saying the people wouldn’t like it, but I shout, ‘Vova! Vova!’ (speak), and the people seeing he was keeping back, shout, ‘Vova’ too, and when he tells them, they smile an incredulous smile, while some appear angry.

“After negating my proposal to bring my white brother the next day to see them, and refusing to take any of the tempting goods I had brought as a present for them, they shake hands and go away. During all this palaver, although they threaten the King of Congo, Sabbi, Cozinheiro, my boy Cam, and all the ambassadors, yet they do not once threaten me; and when speaking I smile in the face of Susu-Mpemba or Antonio. They always smile in a friendly troubled way, and I am sure want us to come, though they cannot allow us. The people, too, seem friendly, although they call after us, ‘Ki-leka-ko’ (You mustn’t sleep here). Nothing more can be done at present; the road this way is clearly shut up, and in weariness and disappointment I return, and reach Kola very tired at 3.30. We decide that the only thing to be done is to try another route.”

Thus defeated at Makuta, Mr. Comber’s first idea was to attempt a route by way of Zombo, but this on further thought was abandoned, and he resolved to

return and remain for three months at San Salvador. This he did, and, together with his brethren, endeavoured to consolidate the Mission in that place. Services were regularly conducted, averaging in attendance, 150; a school for the boys was opened; good progress was made with the language, and perhaps, most important of all, their purpose in going to San Salvador was becoming better understood, and the influence of their characters and lives beginning to tell. Besides these results, temporary premises had been erected, and a stone house had been partially built. The difficulty and time connected with the last of these achievements will be understood when it is stated that two days were occupied in searching for limestone for mortar; three in making a road to get to it; four days in breaking and blasting it; three days to carry two and a-half tons of limestone to the nearest point of the Little Lueji River; ten days making a twenty-four feet canoe to carry a ton of stone and six men to a part of the river where fuel is obtainable and an old kiln exists; four more in building two sheds, one to protect the lime from rain, and the other to protect himself and those who were with him; three days with thirty men dragging canoe from place of cutting to the river; six days clearing the river of obstacles (overgrowths, fallen trees, &c.); four more days collecting wood and burning the lime; and three days getting to San Salvador, with many more days lost through rain. All this before mortar could be obtained and the walls of the house commenced.

About this time the king received a communication from the French Père Superior of the Roman Catholic Mission at Landana, near Banana, consisting of *twenty-one quarto pages*, which, without Mr. Comber's assistance, he could not have deciphered. With ludicrous irony, Mr. Comber gave His Majesty to understand that the Père Superior was full of passionate desire for his welfare; how the writer had

been sent twelve years before to Congo by His Holiness the Pope, but health and strength had failed, and he had been obliged to settle his mission at Landana, having, however, made many unsuccessful attempts to reach Congo, once getting as far as Boma. Mr. Comber did not fail to suggest to the king that it was rather singular, seeing his soul was filled with such ardent love, he had not before, during all the twelve years, sent him a letter. The people were not slow to estimate the "passionate desires" at their true value. Of course, the Père Superior took the opportunity to denounce the missionaries in the strongest terms, as servants of the devil, etc., expatiating upon the doctrines of Protestantism, the Reformation, personal character of Henry VIII., Luther, Calvin and Zwingle. After requesting that carriers might be sent and a house prepared for him, the writer concluded his letter by promising to establish a large mission, and bring a present to the king, of whom he was the profoundly humble, obedient servant, etc. The king was not pleased with this communication, for he even declined to send the requested carriers.

The efforts of the missionaries, though concentrated at San Salvador, were by no means confined to that place; visits into the surrounding country were continually being made, and nearly always with the great object in view of effecting a passage to the Pool. Some of these journeys were of great importance in themselves, giving opportunities for gaining wider knowledge of the people, and for proclaiming the Gospel; and at several of the towns urgent requests were made for the white men to build houses and remain as teachers. As one of these journeys was attended by very serious consequences to Mr. Comber, it must be described in detail. On the occasion referred to, Mr. Comber set forth accompanied by Mr. Hartland, Cam, a linguister, and eight Kroo boys. On arriving at Banza Loango, seven of the

Kroo boys, through fear, deserted. Mr. Comber having been induced to make this particular effort through rumours which again and again had reached San Salvador, to the effect that Bwaka-Mata was willing for the white men to go through his land if they brought with them Kroo boys and no Congo men, he determined to go forward and ascertain whether these rumours were well founded. They passed Moila and Tungwa safely, and at last reached the town they were seeking, Banza Makuta. The reception had better be given in John Hartland's graphic words:—"We walked into the town and asked the people its name, but got no answer. The people drew back a little, and then one man called out 'Ndabonga nkeli, vaunda mundeli!' 'Fetch the guns; kill the white men!' and in an instant they rushed away, returning immediately armed with great sticks, huge pieces of stone, knives, cutlasses, and guns, and, without any word of palaver, commenced dancing and leaping round us, and brandishing their weapons. Mr. Comber sat down by a house, and I was about to do the same, but our assailants yelled out, 'Get up, get up,' and rushed upon us. Such fiendish, blood-thirsty, cruel countenances I never saw. We got up and called to them to stop, that we would go back, but it was no good, and stones came flying towards us, and sticks and knives were brandished around us. We could see the people were determined, not only to drive us from the town, but to have our lives, so there was nothing left for us to do but to attempt flight, though it seemed hopeless. Away we started, amid stones and blows. We all got hit and bruised, but managed to reach the top of the steep hill, when a sudden report rang out behind us above the uproar, and Mr. Comber, who was in front of me, fell. I dashed up to him and tried to assist him to rise, but he said, 'It's no use, John; I'm hit, you go on.'

"How I got down that terrible hill, through the

water, and up the next hill, I don't know, but I overtook Cam just outside the next town, and made him stop and walk through it, for fear its inhabitants should attack us if they saw us running. They had heard the shots and were out with their guns, but seemed undecided what they ought to do, and their indecision saved us. Had they been prepared for us, our case would have been hopeless. As we left this town I heard Mr. Comber shouting behind me, and saw him running towards us. We waited an instant until he came up, and then went full speed down the next hill and up into another town, followed by the furious Banza Makuta people. Mr. Comber kept up well. He had been shot in the middle of the back, but the ball had not entered the lungs, for he experienced no difficulty in breathing, and his wound did not bleed very much. After we left the last town and got on the road, we thought the people had given up pursuit, so left off running, and walked on sharply along the road to Tungwa; but, on looking round soon we saw three men following swiftly after us, armed with knives, sticks, and a gun. They gained on us rapidly, and we, though beaten and wounded, took to running again. When we started, our pursuers set up a most horrible, demoniacal yell, redoubled their efforts, and threw stones after us, many of which whizzed past us, but none hit us. It was now a race for life along that weary road; we had to exert ourselves to our utmost, and throw away everything we were carrying. On we dashed, and on came the blood-thirsty savages behind us; once they came within shot and fired at us, but without harming us. So we continued running and being run after for five miles, until we drew near to Tungwa, by which time our pursuers had grown tired and given up the chase. We walked hurriedly through Tungwa without allowing the people to know what had happened, crossed the river, and were out on the road again. The shades of night were now falling, and we

pressed on at our utmost speed, fearing still that the people were not far behind. By dark we reached the town where we had left our Moila man. With his aid we continued our journey in the darkness, often tripping and stumbling, but still continuing our course, for life depended on our putting a long distance between ourselves and Banza Makuta, and outrunning the news in this still unfriendly country.

At nine o'clock we reached Kola, the town where we had slept the previous night. Here we rested until past twelve, and then—fearing pursuit, and, perhaps, too, treachery from the people—we started again. The night was pitchy black—no moon or stars. We could only feel our road, and often had to keep hold of each other's walking-poles to keep together. So we walked on until three o'clock, passing through several towns on tiptoe for fear of waking the people; but at last we came to a large town, where our guide lost the way. There was a river before us which could only be crossed by a bridge, and that bridge we could not find in the darkness, so, after an hour's fruitless search, we lay ourselves down in the road to wait for the day—two weary hours, during which the others slept, and I, after in vain trying to find another way over the river, sat and watched. When the long-wished-for dawn broke we went back into the town, and found the road. We were all desperately tired, and Mr. Comber was getting faint with his wound; but we pressed on until we had crossed the Quiloa, passed Banza Mputa, and reached a friendly town two hours beyond. Here Mr. Comber was quite 'done up,' and the small flask of brandy—the only thing we managed to save—failed. We sat in this town about an hour, and ate a little rice. Mr. Comber revived a little, and we started again. Fortunately, we were able to get a few men, and I made up a hammock of a blanket, so that we got on as far as Sanda by the middle of the afternoon, Mr. Comber in the hammock, Cam and I walking. At Sanda we

were among friends—warm friends too—and their expressions of indignation and kindly sympathy almost brought tears into our eyes. Everything we wanted they got for us, and we laid down to sleep with a feeling of comparative safety, knowing that if we were followed our friends would have protected us at the risk of their own lives. We were able at Sanda to ‘look over’ ourselves, to ascertain what harm we had sustained. Cam had come off the best, with scarcely a bruise. Mr. Comber’s wound appeared to be only a slight one, the bullet having struck against the spine, and not penetrated beyond, although it had made a nasty wound in the muscles of the back. I had several bruises from sticks and stones, one particularly on my right temple, caused by a huge piece of stone and a thick stick thrown at me, which at the time almost stunned me. There was a great gash in the shoulder of my shirt, which the natives assure me was cut by a knife; how I escaped being stabbed is truly miraculous. Our whole escape from these fierce people, whose determination was evidently our destruction, was most wonderful. Nothing but the unfailing care and loving guarding of our Heavenly Father could have saved us from their hands. Need I say how sincerely our hearts and voices rose in deepest gratitude and thankfulness to Him who had been with us and delivered us when no other arm could have saved us? Our God and Master has truly been our ‘shield and defender,’ and has not failed or forsaken His servants in their time of need.

“The rest of my story is soon told. We got fresh carriers for the hammock, and a crowd of men to accompany us, and in two days more, weary and worn out, we arrived at Congo, having come about eighty miles in three days. All along the road the people were most indignant at the conduct of the Banza Makuta people, and most warm in their sympathies with us.

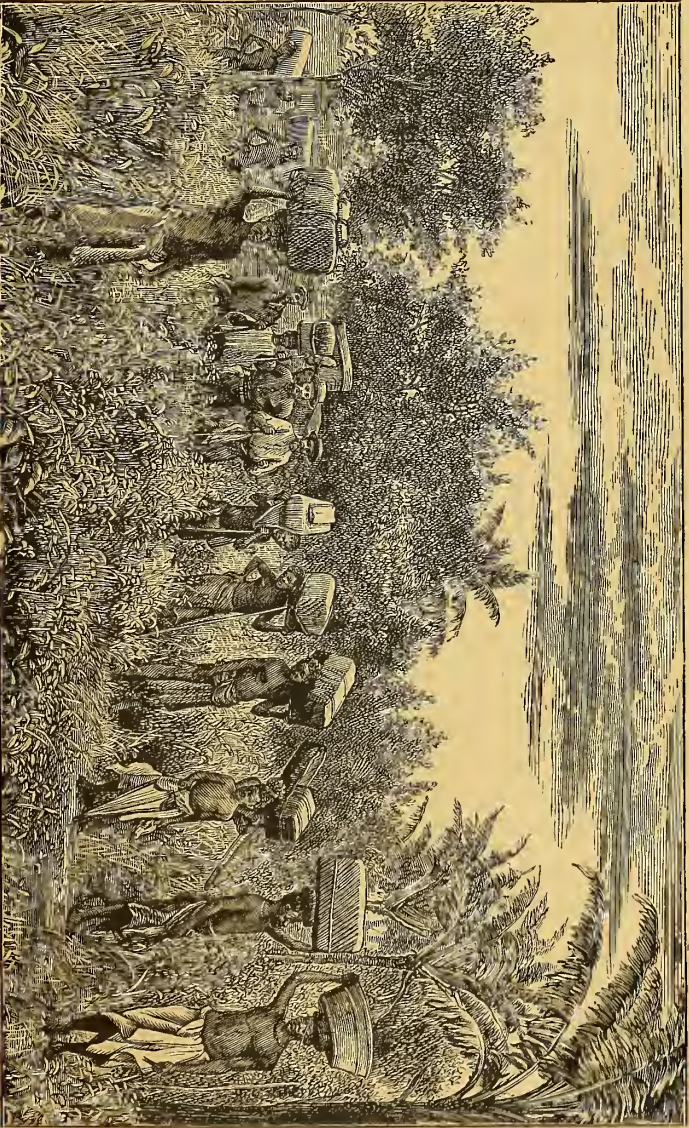
“On the evening of our arrival at Congo, Mr.

Crudgington extracted the bullet—a square piece of ironstone—which was imbedded more than an inch in the muscles of the back. Mr. Comber is doing very well, and, with the exception of his wound, is in excellent health.

“Please excuse this hurried scrawl. I am writing immediately, so that you may have the news as soon as possible. By next mail I expect Mr. Comber will send you a fuller account of the whole affair, and a view of its bearings on our work for the future. Mr. Crudgington is sending with this his official report of the extracting operation and the state of Mr. Comber’s health, which, I again assure our friends, is most satisfactory.”

Unfortunately, as the bullet wound was making satisfactory progress, Mr. Comber was overtaken with a serious attack of fever, so serious that fears were entertained he would not recover. But under Mr. Crudgington’s skilful treatment the fever subsided, the wound was completely healed, and in a short time Mr. Comber regained his usual health.

Great, however, as had been their difficulties, the missionaries were undaunted in their efforts to reach the Pool. “Would you be surprised and scared,” Mr. Comber wrote, after a while, to his father, “if you heard I was again travelling towards Makuta? We are hoping that the Great Overruler for good will turn to the best account the unfortunate shooting business—yes, overrule it for good, and make *that* the cause of the opening of the long shut road. A *great palaver* is being held at Makuta, and every one is said to be threatening our enemy, Bwaka-Mata, if he does not let us pass. Of course, if it is settled on our side, I shall make sure before setting my foot on such inhospitable ground again, and shall not go unless escorted by Congo men. I think these precautions necessary after what has happened. Oh, I do pray God to open this road for us, and to lead us right on to Stanley Pool soon.”



THE MARCH TO STANLEY POOL.

(From a Photograph by Mr. Bentley.)

And, on the point of making this last effort *viâ* Makuta, he wrote to all at home: "We have been tremendously busy packing up, and are now on the eve of all clearing out of San Salvador, shutting up the houses and leaving them in charge of the king, and making a grand effort to reach Stanley Pool in two parties. Crudginton and Bentley, with fifteen Kroo boys and one Congo man, return to the coast and try the north bank in the wake of Stanley; while Hartland and I, with eight Kroo boys, eight Congo and six Moila men, are going to try again *viâ* Makuta. After a three months' palaver, the road is said to be free to us, and we are to pass unmolested. As long as these natives are with us, there is no danger. You don't catch a Congo man running his head into a noose, any more than you do a weasel asleep. So, if we can't get these men with us, we shall return, as it isn't right to create disturbances all over the country by being shot. I am foolish enough to be again very hopeful. We have carefully sifted and weighed all reports, etc., and earnestly and constantly prayed for guidance, and feel that we *have* been directed in this matter. There seems to be no danger so far as we can see, and we can trust to our 'Help's shield.' The chief at Ntamo, or Kintamo, on Stanley Pool, has heard of our efforts to reach him—so reports say—and is keeping the 'big goat,' which Stanley gave him, expressly for us; so if we do get it, we shall try and send it home, to give it to the noble lady for whom it was first intended—Baroness Burdett Coutts—although I fear she'll find it uncommon tough by this time. I should dearly like to still sit up (it is past midnight now) and write a long letter, if not several. Home letters will, of course, go with me on the road, and I shall write as soon as an opportunity occurs.

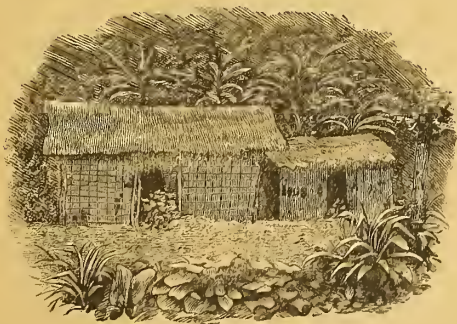
"I could never explain to you the weariness of the last three days' palaver here, in arranging everything with king and people. The Tichborne case is the

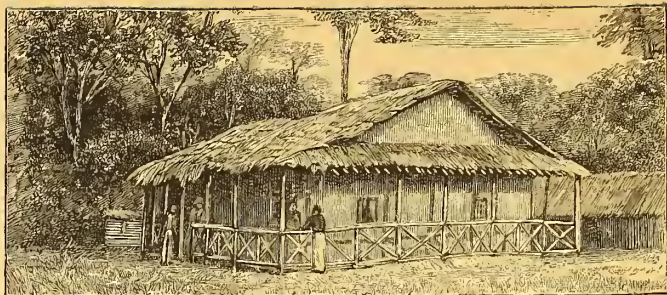
only parallel. Our journey will be over, I expect, before I can ask you specially to pray for us in this another attempt ; but I know you do not forget the old boy in Africa.

“ Earnestly trusting that you are all well, and will not be *unnecessarily* frightened at our again going to Makuta, and with much love, I remain, always with much affection,
TOM.”

But, though Mr. Comber was not personally destined to reach the Pool by the Makuta road, the courage and perseverance of the Congo band were at last triumphantly rewarded. The heroic achievement was ultimately effected by Mr. Bentley and Mr. Crudgington, by a route those missionaries forced from Musuka, to which place on the Lower Congo they returned, then passed through Vivi, and kept along the north bank to Stanley Pool.

To describe that remarkable feat would be foreign to these pages, but it may unhesitatingly be regarded as one of the most extraordinary in modern travel.





CHAPTER IX.

EVENTS AND PROCEEDINGS, CONTINUED, PREVIOUS TO REACHING STANLEY POOL.

THE attempt to reach the upper river by the Makuta route again proving impracticable, Mr. Comber and Mr. Hartland returned to San Salvador, and went immediately down to Musuka, with the hope of joining the expedition on the north bank. In this hope they were disappointed, as Mr. Bentley and Mr. Crudginton were a week's journey in advance. They did not, however, retrace their steps until they had reached Kinguvu, nearly half-way up to the Pool, and only then being driven back by failing supplies.

En route, Mr. Comber rested at a station of the Livingstone Inland Mission; and afterwards met with Mr. Stanley, who was superintending the foundation of the Congo Free State, from whom he received much valuable information.

Whilst on this journey, a letter arrived for Mr. Comber at Boma, from the British Consul, with the intelligence that four Jesuits had reached Loanda from Portugal; that, under the protection and patronage of the Portuguese Government, they were on a

mission to San Salvador, charged with splendid and costly presents to the king; and that they were to be accompanied by naval and military officers of high rank. When this letter came into Mr. Comber's hands, he was naturally concerned lest so imposing a display of force and such a superabundance of gifts should turn Don Pedro's head.

Whilst waiting for the return of the brethren from the Pool, Mr. Comber went down to Banana to seek for more men in view of future operations. When the missionaries met again, which they did early in March, 1881, their consultations resulted in a depôt for stores being opened at Musuka; an earnest request being sent home for a sectional steel boat; in Mr. Crudgington being dispatched to England to confer with the Committee of the Society, especially with a view to reinforcements; and in the three other missionaries hastening to San Salvador to counteract, if possible, the harmful influence of the Jesuit priests.

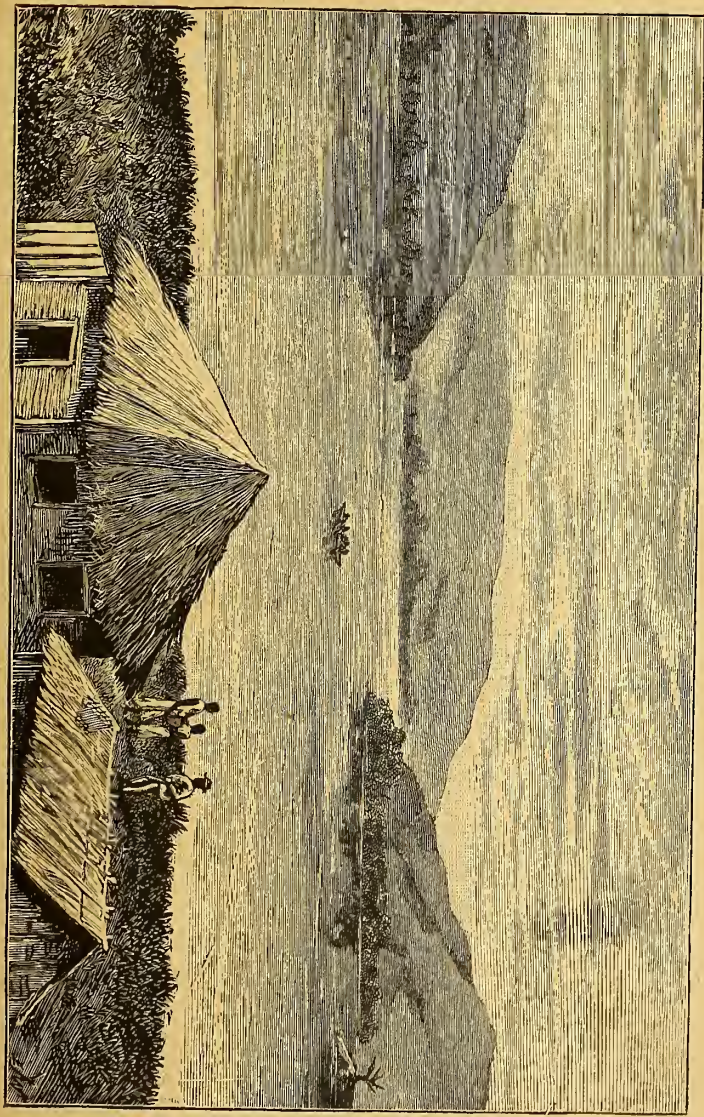
The last decision was speedily carried into effect, the journey to San Salvador being accomplished by an improved route in five days. The reception welcoming the return of the missionaries was altogether beyond expectation. Their approach had been heralded by an advance courier. Matoka, one of the principal men of the place, and who, from the first, had been their friend, with several others, came forth to greet them, and when they were inside the town, the manifestations of pleasure were most demonstrative; "hands everywhere being outstretched to be shaken; eyes beaming with glad welcome, and voices raised to the highest pitch contending for a hearing." They found that their property had been most carefully preserved. Whilst they were taking refreshment, who should appear but two of the Jesuit priests! They actually came—so strong are the sympathies of nature, one touch of which makes the whole world kin—to request medical help on behalf of their two

colleagues, who were ill with fever. After paying their respects to His Majesty, whom they found glad to see them, the missionaries proceeded to minister aid to the sick men whose presence in San Salvador was for the express purpose of hindering and destroying their work. And when afterwards they heard the Jesuits were wanting in food they sent them some of their best provisions. Here, surely, was an instance of heaping coals of fire upon an enemy's head!

Upon inquiry, Mr. Comber and his companions soon discovered they had very little real reason to fear from the presence of the priests; for they found they were far from popular, and that the people were very strongly in favour of the English missionaries.

As soon as the Mission was thoroughly re-established, and leaving Mr. Hartland in charge, Mr. Comber and Mr. Bentley returned to the river to devote their energies to the planting of the two new stations between Musuka and the Pool. It was determined to fix the first at Isangila, and the other at Manyanga. The labour involved was immense; fortunately, the two brethren had now the advantage of Mr. Grenfell's presence and assistance. In course of a short time, a temporary house 36×12 ft. was built at Isangila, and some 300 loads—cloth, provisions, etc., were carried up from Musuka. This new station was to be held by Mr. Bentley, whilst Mr. Comber and Mr. Grenfell were to move forward to Manyanga. In this plan, however, Mr. Comber was disappointed, for just at this juncture he was overtaken by a serious attack of fever. It was decided that as soon as he was convalescent, his two colleagues should undertake the forward movement, whilst he himself should go down to the coast, and on to the Kroo country to secure more men. In referring to this disarrangement of plans, he expressed himself thus: "I cannot tell you how disappointing this is to me, but—like many other Christian African travellers, Gordon, for instance—I am becoming a sort of Christian fatalist; and about all such things I say:

THE RIVER CONGO FROM MUSUKA.



‘It is all ordered, all inevitable, all God’s will, and therefore all for the best.’”

On his way to the Kroo country he passed within sight of Victoria. Would that the boat could have called! For had not his sister Carrie come to live there, having undertaken missionary work in connection with the school, thus realising the long-cherished desire of her heart? On his way north, he also passed the steamer carrying the English mails; this was especially trying as having previously heard of the dangerous illness of his little sister Clara, he was most anxious to receive his letters. To this sister—a child of his father’s second family—he was particularly attached. How dear a place in his affectionate heart this little girl held, the following two letters will show. The first is written to this sister.

“MY DEAREST LITTLE SISTER,—Although I have allowed 54 days for this letter to reach you by your birthday on the 3rd of July, I am afraid it will be too late. I hope not, because when I send you a birthday letter, I should like it to be delivered by the postman on the very morning.

“Once more, dearest little Pussie, I have to write to wish you many happy returns of your birthday. Your big brother Tom does not forget his little sister, although he is so far away in Africa. It is now more than two years since I saw you, and said good-bye to you; and, do you know, I should like to see you again if I could. I wonder if Puss of twelve years old would jump into my arms and give me good hugs and kisses, like the smaller Pussie of years gone by, or whether she would hold out her hand, with a bow, and say ‘It gives me great pleasure to see you, Mr. Tom Comber.’ I think I know which it would be. Only don’t you go for to come for to think, that I am coming home suddenly and quickly again, to surprise you—as I did two and a-half years ago; because I mean to try to do a lot of work before I come home this time. I wonder

if my dear little sister, when she sometimes thinks about me, as I feel she does now and then, if she ever thinks *why* Tom has left his country, his home, his dear, loving friends, to come to a country like Africa, perhaps to be shot. Why do I do it? Why does your sister Carrie do it? For Jesus' sake, dear Clara. Because our dear Saviour Jesus, who loves us so much, *asks* us to do it. So we have given up our lives to Him, just as you might give something to mamma or papa, because you love them. You understand, don't you? I don't like to be away from you all like this, but Jesus has asked me to come to Africa to teach the poor Africans about His love. Has my dear little sister ever yet thought of giving anything to Jesus? or doing anything specially for Him? She can't come out to Africa. That kind of work is for bigger people. But I daresay Clara could find something to offer Jesus. I wonder if she could think of anything. Let it but be offered out of love to Him, and He'll be so pleased to accept it. I do wish you could think of something. I do hope, darling, you will have a happy birthday, and that you will have a very happy year, so that when you are *thirteen* years old—in 1882, you can look back upon it with pleasure and happiness. O Clara, dear! parties are pleasant, concerts, days at Greenwich or the Crystal Palace very good and enjoyable; home, sweet home, and the love of father, and mother, sisters and brothers, are better and happier still, but there is nothing that makes us so thoroughly happy as the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ. I do believe my dear little sister is trying to be one of Christ's disciples. There, now! my birthday sermon is done, and I believe my dear Pussie will think about it and remember it. I was so glad to see dear Carrie a few months ago at Victoria. She looked so well. She told me how nicely you were getting on—especially with your music. Now, you have not written to me for a long time. It's too bad! I want to know all about you, your lessons, your new home, etc.

I want a letter of three or four well-filled sheets. Do write soon. I hope dear ma is well. Also dear father, Tuke, and Harry. My best love to them all.

“I’ve got several more letters to write, and want to send them off to-day, so I must say good-bye to my dearest little sister. I blow you a good kiss, and hope the breeze will carry it.—Ever your loving brother,
“TOM.”

On receipt of the sad tidings of her death, Mr. Comber wrote home in the following tender strains:—

“I only heard the sad news yesterday about our darling’s death; my heart is brim full of pity and sorrow on my own behalf, but chiefly upon yours. Sweet, precious, little darling! Oh, how she, with her clinging, loving disposition, wound herself round all our hearts. Poor ma! poor father! The gracious Lord, loving and tender, the God of all comfort, bind up your bruised and bleeding hearts; and, as *He can*, make this sad, terrible affliction, turn into blessing. Oh, how different home will be without darling little Clara, my little pet, Pussie. I think you both know how much I loved her. I never loved any little one as I did her, and besides my own precious little wife, I have scarcely ever called any one ‘my darling’ as I have dearest little Pussie. She was without exception the sweetest, most loving little spirit I ever met. And I have been anxiously and yet hopefully watching her growing-up, and praying for all the Saviour’s richest and tenderest care and blessing to rest upon her. But she is such a ‘precious jewel’ of the Saviour’s that He has taken her to His own bosom, to care for her Himself. ‘What is a jewel, Tom?’ she once asked me while we were singing ‘When He cometh to make up His Jewels.’ Now the little darling knows what Christ’s jewels are, and how precious to Him are His ‘little children who love their Redeemer.’ I can hardly see to write, as I think of her sitting on ma’s lap, and speaking to you just before Jesus took

her to Himself. I seem to hear the words she said—the half-frightened fluttering cry—‘Oh, papa! what shall I do?’ And, in the knowledge that Jesus was to be henceforth mother and father to her—the trusting, simple child’s cry, ‘O Jesus, do be quick.’ How much Jesus must love this child-like, trusting simplicity, when He tells us we must all ‘become as little children.’ Ma dear! my poor father! You have had the sweetest, dearest little soul I have ever known. She is yours. God gave her to you. She belongs to *you* more than to any one else, except her Saviour, to whom we all owe ourselves, body, soul, and spirit. She is your ‘treasure,’ though taken from you for awhile, so that your affections may be drawn to and centred in heaven. She, little Muriel, my Minnie, my own dear mother, Margie—all safely home—out of the tossing billows of our stormy life. Hail to the day when we shall also be there! They’ll be watching and waiting for us. All our weariness, doubts, disappointments, sorrows, will be at an end when we reach our Father’s house. Dear ma! dear father! A perfectly wise and lovingly tender Father is carefully planning our lives. Trees planted by Himself—He hedges us round, trains us up, waters us, sometimes prunes us even, taking off little tender shoots which are part of ourselves—as He has done with little Clara; and all is done with wise and loving intent. He does not leave us to straggle up wild. It is not chance or fate. He knows, He cares, He does all—wisely and well. I don’t know what to say to comfort you. I must leave you to the only One who, as the great skilful Physician, can apply the balm of comfort to your hearts. When my Minnie was taken away, it did me good to have loving hearts recalling to me all that was so dear in her. I hope that my words—meant to strengthen and help, if God will use them thus—will not make your hearts more sad. I cannot tell you how sorry I feel for you both. I think you will find, as I did, that the memory of her

is not one that would be drowned because of the sadness of her going away. It is sweet to me to think of my Minnie, and the time will come when—in the assurance of a Redeemer's love, and of a reunion—the memory of our darling little Clara will be sweet and helpful to you, and not altogether sad."

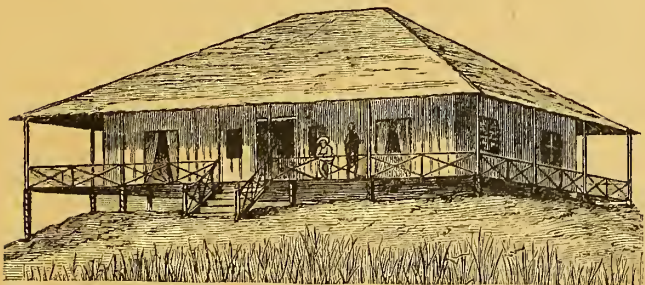
The steamer that carried the mail had also on board Mr. Crudgington, returning from England, who was accompanied by one new missionary—Mr. Dixon; one of six—six being the least number which it had been felt the exigencies of the Mission demanded. On finding their strength was only increased by the addition of one new man, Mr. Comber was much disappointed. However, he looked up to the God of heaven, and in trustful confidence determined to go forward, hoping that soon the full contingent asked for would be forthcoming. He knew that upon Mr. Baynes, the General Secretary of the Society, who had done so much to inspire interest in the Congo Mission, he could fully depend. Very soon after Mr. Crudgington left England with Mr. Dixon, another missionary, in the person of Mr. Weeks, was sent out, who again was followed almost immediately by Mr. Butcher.

The appeal for a sectional steel boat was not made in vain, a friend at Plymouth, after the name of which town it was named, supplying the need. This particular boat was required for navigation along the reach on the lower river between Isangila and Manyanga. From Musuka it was conveyed by water as far as Vivi. At the time of its conveyance the Congo was in flood; and Mr. Comber described the effort as being terribly wild work in boiling, seething water, rapids, whirlpools, and cauldrons. The land transport also involved great labour and no little anxiety, owing largely to the scarcity of carriers obtainable in the country itself, and the disgust of the Kroom boys in having to go over the same ground as many as fourteen times. The journey, though only a

distance of fifty miles, and usually traversed in three days, occupied not less than three months. But the *Plymouth* was worth all the trouble of transport, for on being launched at Isangila she could carry as much cargo as forty carriers.

Mr. Comber now felt that the Congo Mission in its broader intentions and wider programme was "getting under weigh;" that soon their stations would become something more than mere depôts. The urgent need, however, he continually felt was "more men, more men." He wondered why it was so difficult amongst the thousands of earnest Christian young men in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, and other towns, to find six suitable volunteers. "Six men, forsooth! Why, as Bentley says, 'If it were a gold mine we had discovered, it would be very easy to find men ready to come to Africa.'"

About this time Mr. Grenfell visited England to superintend the building of the steamer the *Peace*, required for use on the Upper Congo, above Stanley Pool, which steamer had been most generously presented to the Society, with provision for its maintenance, by Mr. Arthington.



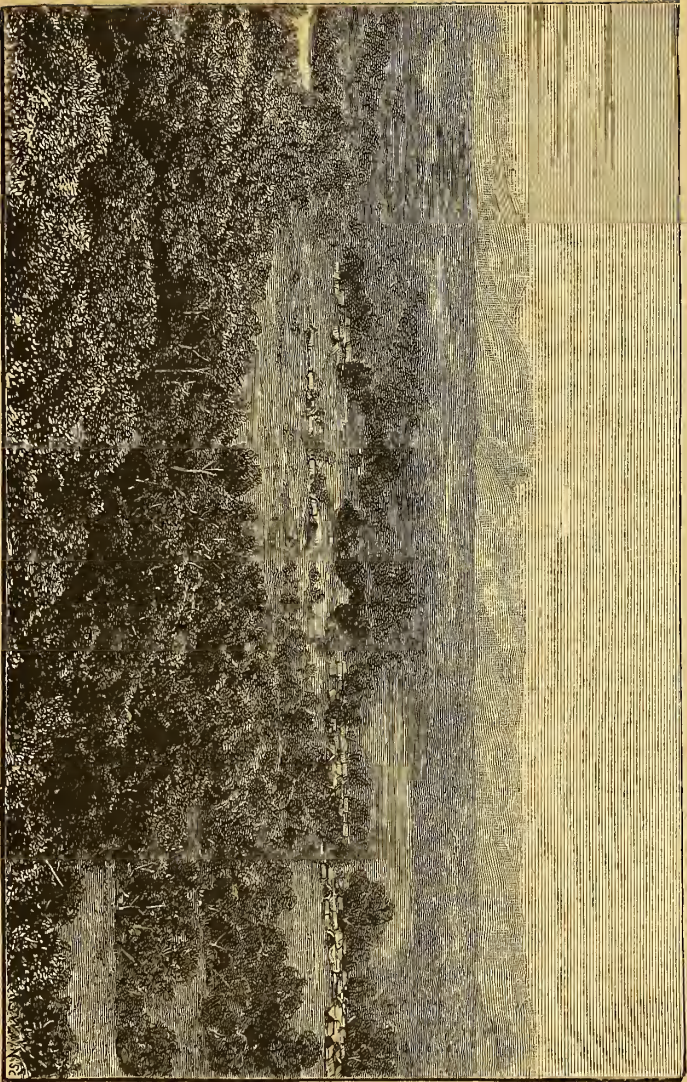


CHAPTER X.

LIFE AND LABOURS, MAINLY ON THE UPPER CONGO.

IN an interview with Mr. Stanley, Mr. Comber had made arrangements for a site for the new station at the Pool; and deeming it of the utmost importance that the site should be obtained, he hastened without delay to secure it. This was his first visit to Stanley Pool, the date being July, 1882. The journey occupied eight days, and was accomplished without difficulty. He was received most kindly by Lieut. Braconnier, whom Stanley had left in charge of Leopoldville, the State station. Immediately on his arrival he proceeded to Kintamo, the native town, to pay his respects to the great Nga Liema—that important man and his people being real, untamed savages. He had never seen such individuals before: “wild and ferocious in appearance, with eyebrows shaved off, and eyelashes pulled out, streaks of red and yellow ochre and chalk encircling their eyes.” A good present had a soothing effect upon Nga Liema, so that he listened to what Mr. Comber had to say, and expressed himself pleased at the prospect of his coming to live amongst his people, especially as the missionary practised the healing art. “But,” wrote

KINTAMO, STANLEY POOL, CONGO RIVER.



Mr. Comber, "Nga Liema must be something awful when he is worked up into a passion ; it must be our work, however, to try and get an influence over him, and make his savage nature tame and tractable. May the Lord help us in this, give us this influence over him, and by His Holy Spirit soften and humanise the spirit of Nga Liema. There are a few nice boys in the town, whom we shall try as soon as possible to get under our influence."

When the arrangements for the new site were carried into effect, Mr. Comber, leaving one of his party to clear the ground, went down again to Manyanga. Whilst there he wrote as under to his old and dear friend, Mr. Rickards :—" When you read this, it will be six years since I left England to serve Christ in Africa. During this time it has not been my lot to go in a groove. Little of sameness and plenty of vicissitudes have fallen to my share. I have not chosen my way or my department of work. He has given it to me to do, and has upholden me in it, so that in this dark and great land I have been able in a small way to 'prepare the way of the Lord,' and to a little extent to 'make straight' in Cameroons and Congo a highway.' I feel now that my work in this department may be drawing to a close, and that I shall be settling down at Stanley Pool. Whether so or not, I know that He will guide me and show me the way I am to take. As to Congo here, my very dear colleagues, all 'good men and true,' and myself, have just about completed our difficult first work, and the magnificent thousand miles and more of unimpeded water-way is open to us, with all the great tribes and myriads of dark sinful souls on its banks, and those of its great affluents. We have established our five stations, and commenced work in some measure at each. It has been a difficult work, and we have had to stick to it, shoulder by shoulder, in frequent disappointments and sometimes blows 'heavy and hard to bear ;' but our loving Father has been pleased to deal very

graciously with our beloved Congo Mission, with its work and its staff. It is terrible to read the statistics of our contemporaries—the Livingstone Inland Mission and the African International Association—Stanley's. They are as follows (reckoning Grenfell and his three new hands expected to arrive at Banana) :—

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------|-----|-----------|-----|------------|-----|--------|-----|
| B.M.S. | Loss by Death, | 1. | Returned, | 0. | In Africa, | 11. | Total, | 12. |
| L.I.M. | " | 8. | " | 14. | " | 15. | " | 37. |
| A.I.A. | " | 11. | " | 14. | " | 37. | " | 62. |

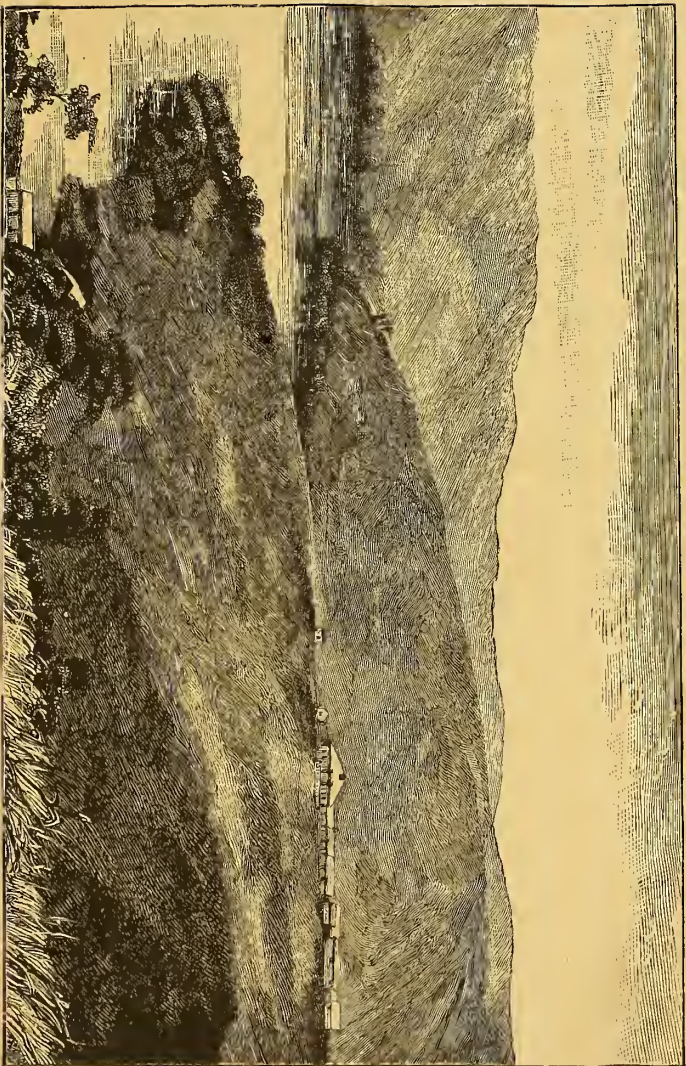
Does it not seem marvellous, God's care of and goodness to us?"

On Mr. Bentley's return to Manyanga, Mr. Comber was set free, and went up again to the Pool to begin building operations; the Belgians receiving him with their former kindness. He soon made friends with the people round about, and put up the framework of a house; but when he had partly thatched the roof, he was overtaken with a fever, similar to that at Isangila and San Salvador. By this illness he was hindered a month, but towards the end of November he had fully recovered, and was able to complete and take possession of his new house, and proceed to the erection of other necessary buildings.

"Fancy!" Mr. Comber wrote to his father, on the 27th of December, "Fancy! your letters came on Christmas day. I was expecting a caravan, and perhaps Bentley, on that day (he had been alone for two months), and just as dinner was getting ready I walked out a little way along the Manyanga road, spied the Union Jack of my caravan from Manyanga, and got my letters—though no Bentley arrived. Dinner was a failure altogether. A leg of a goat, who might have been 100 years old, baked in a baking-pot with sage and onions—all dried up to a cinder, and as tough as an old bachelor hippopotamus, a little boiled fish, the numerous bones of which threatened to choke me, and a Morton's plum-pudding. Fact is, I had no appetite. I'd read, whilst eating my fish, the letters from my

colleagues down below, one or two of which showed things were not going altogether straight, and then I had a heap of dear home letters by my side to read. I soon got some coffee, and 'set to' at my delightful task—yours, Sid's, a scrap from Percy, two from Carrie, the usual batch from Kilburn, Mr. Rickards, Emmie, Sallie and Charlie's, *such* a letter from Mr. Baynes, Grenfell, &c.—it was a treat and no mistake. Three hours of steady, delightful reading; and such letters—especially of Mr. Baynes. My blood tingled, I felt my hair tending to stand on end, and, although it was a cool day, I perspired so profusely that I was constantly mopping, and had to change shirt and singlet in the middle, and again directly after reading through. I'm sure it wasn't the coffee I was drinking which made me so perspire; 'twas the letters. Then the nervous and mental effect of them was very strange. They almost made me seedy, and I had to put them altogether aside for a time and lie down. But, oh! it was a glorious mail, and was partly my Christmas 'good-tidings.'"

A few weeks before this date, the Congo band was strengthened by the addition of two new missionaries—Mr. Moolenaar and Mr. Hughes—who were shortly followed by Mr. Grenfell bringing a third in the person of Mr. Doke. The latter two brethren were entrusted with the precious cargo, the *Peace*, which steamer had been built by Messrs. Thornycroft, and constructed in sections for overland transport. As the onerous labour of carrying up this vessel to the Pool was under the superintendence of Mr. Grenfell, an account of the way in which this transport was effected does not properly belong to these pages. It will, however, be readily understood that during the time the eight hundred loads were being conveyed to their destination, the transit was a matter of no small anxiety to Mr. Comber. What he thought of the memorable achievement, so successfully performed by Mr. Grenfell, may be seen from the terms in which he



UNDERHILL, OR TUNDUWA STATION, CONGO RIVER.

wrote to Mrs. Hartland :—" You will have heard how good God has been to us, especially in the matter of the steamer—how dear old Grenfell has alone accomplished the gigantic task of reconstructing her. I can tell you we are proud of Grenfell, and thankful to God for him."

But, during the period between the unloading of the *Peace* at Underhill (Tunduwa), in January, 1883, and its reconstruction and launch at Stanley Pool in June, 1884, heavy trials overtook the Congo Mission. In three weeks after his arrival, Mr. Doke was smitten down by fever ; and in three months after Mr. Doke's early death, Mr. Hartland was called away, his decease taking place at Bayneston (Vunda). Mr. Comber, who was on a visitation of the stations, heard at Manyanga of his friend's serious illness, and at once hastened down to be with him. He found all that could be done was being done, but with no success. The dying missionary was, however, except at short intervals, perfectly conscious, and the intercourse between the two friends who were so closely attached was as wrapt as it was solemn. The pathetic account sent by Mr. Comber to Mrs. Hartland has appeared in the *Missionary Herald*, but must not be omitted here :—

"During all day, Friday, and during half of the following night, I was constantly talking to him and sitting by his side. And, oh, what talks we had ! What glorious words he spoke ! His reluctance entirely disappeared, and he was only anxious to depart. What words of faith, trustfulness, and peace did he speak. 'Whether He wants you to serve Him here longer, or wishes you to go to His service in heaven, you're satisfied and willing, aren't you, John?' 'Oh, yes ; it's all right now ; I'm so glad, and to be with Christ is far better. I do want to see Him and be with Him. I'm so glad.' And then towards mid-day, as every hour I thought would be his last, with my hands clasped in his, we seemed to go so

near to the boundary line. And some such solemn words were spoken, some of them almost too solemn to speak about: 'O John,' said I, 'perhaps in an hour you will be there, you will see the Saviour, and be at His feet; O John!' 'O Tom!' was all at the moment he said, with a voice full of solemnity and earnest feeling; presently afterwards, 'I shall be like Him, for I shall see Him as He is. It's all right; it must be right.' 'Yes, John, Jesus is faithful and trustworthy.' 'Oh, yes; if Jesus stands, I stand; if He falls only, I fall. O Christ! simply to Thy cross I cling. My trust, my hope is in Thee.'

"At times he would look into the darkness of the valley with a little dread. 'Oh, I don't know what it's like. I do hope Satan will not come and torment me with doubts. Jesus, hold me tight; hold me with Thy powerful hand.' And Jesus did hold him tightly all the time.

"Much did we talk of our very dear work together at Camden Road Children's Service, and of the rich blessings we ourselves obtained while trying to bless and help the dear little ones; and once when I said to him, 'John, when you are in heaven, you'll, if possible, help us still; and perhaps, as Holman says, be better able to help us there than you are here.' 'Oh yes, I shall be always interceding for you all, and also for our dear young friends at Camden.' And so passed the last day but one; happy, holy communings, with sometimes throbbing hearts and burning tears, as awful and blessed things were realised, and the heavenly home seemed so close. Sometimes he wished me to read or sing to him. 'Sing "Rock of Ages" or "Jesus, Lover of my soul."' Every hour we were expecting the Master to come and call for him.

"Saturday morning dawned and found us still watching and waiting. As full daylight came, I blew out the candles and flung open the windows. 'The light of another day, John. How little yesterday we expected this. Perhaps He is intending to keep you

here. Whether you go or stay—or whether, if you go, He takes you quickly, or leaves you lingering and waiting—you believe He will do the best, don't you, John?' 'Ah, yes. He knows best. Just as He wills.' But the day was spent in weary waiting, and his heart's desire seemed to be, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' Parting directions about certain matters were given; loving thoughts always reverting to his dear home, and especially to his mother and Gwennie; and occasionally singing a hymn or speaking some of the gracious, blessed words of the Master and Saviour—we waited. He was full of peace, rest, and glad hope, listening for the Saviour's voice—we, his grieving colleagues, were also waiting and expectant. At the close of the afternoon he occasionally wandered, but a word or pressure of the hand always recalled him.

"Just about six o'clock he opened his eyes with a look of surprise and awe, and, raising his hand up, kept it pointing upwards. His breath became more and more feeble and gasping, and for half-an-hour he said nothing, and I thought he would pass away thus. But just before a quarter to seven he opened his eyes fully, and feeling 'the time was at hand,' he struggled over to the other side of the bed, and looking up, cried out: 'Christ is all in all; Christ is all in all. Let me go, my friends. Don't hold me back. Let me go, Tom. I must go. I *want* to go to Him. Simply to Thy cross I cling. Let me go!' His struggles ceased. I put my hand to his pulse. Dear John had gone. He was with his Saviour. Oh, my dear Mrs. Hartland, the dear Lord comfort and help us all—especially you, his mother, Gwennie Thomas, who had given her love to him, and her heart and life to Africa, his sisters, his father. I can only plead for you all. I know how dear he was to you all. For us of the Congo Mission, we have lost not only a dear and loved colleague—and you know how much we love each other—but one of our old, long-tried, and experienced brothers.

“For myself, as you know, our friendship was eight years old. Hand-in-hand we worked for the dear children at Camden. Glorious work, and hand-in-hand we worked for the redemption of the ‘Dark Continent,’ the time—the set time—to ‘favour’ which is come. Let my last end be like his.”

Having readjusted affairs at Bayneston (Vunda), required by Mr. Hartland’s death, Mr. Comber proceeded to Underhill (Tunduwa), and thence to San Salvador, taking his boy Mantu, according to promise, to visit his friends. After three months’ difficult and anxious work, journeying no less than 700 miles, he returned to the Pool, where, for a season, he and Mr. Bentley, with some measure of quiet, were able to pursue their labours. The time was spent in finishing the buildings, acquiring the language, healing the sick, endeavouring to secure boys for the school, and to favourably influence the people. It was during this period that a complete circuit was made of the Pool, occupying three days, and it was found to be six times the size Stanley had indicated—being about two and a-half times the size of the Isle of Wight. Hippopotami in large numbers were seen, sometimes as many as twenty in one herd. After passing a place called Mfwa an enormous crocodile made an attack upon the boat, but was successfully disposed of by a Martini bullet. As to the population it was discovered that the greater part were dwelling on the south-eastern shore.

In March, 1884, Mr. Comber was again called away from the Pool to Manyanga by the death of Mr. Hartley and two engineers, which calamity, in all human probability, was occasioned by over eagerness, and want of care in changing wet clothes. Mr. Comber felt these fatalities as a most dreadful blow, and feared they would appal the friends of the Mission in England, who would begin to think they were careless about precious lives in Africa.

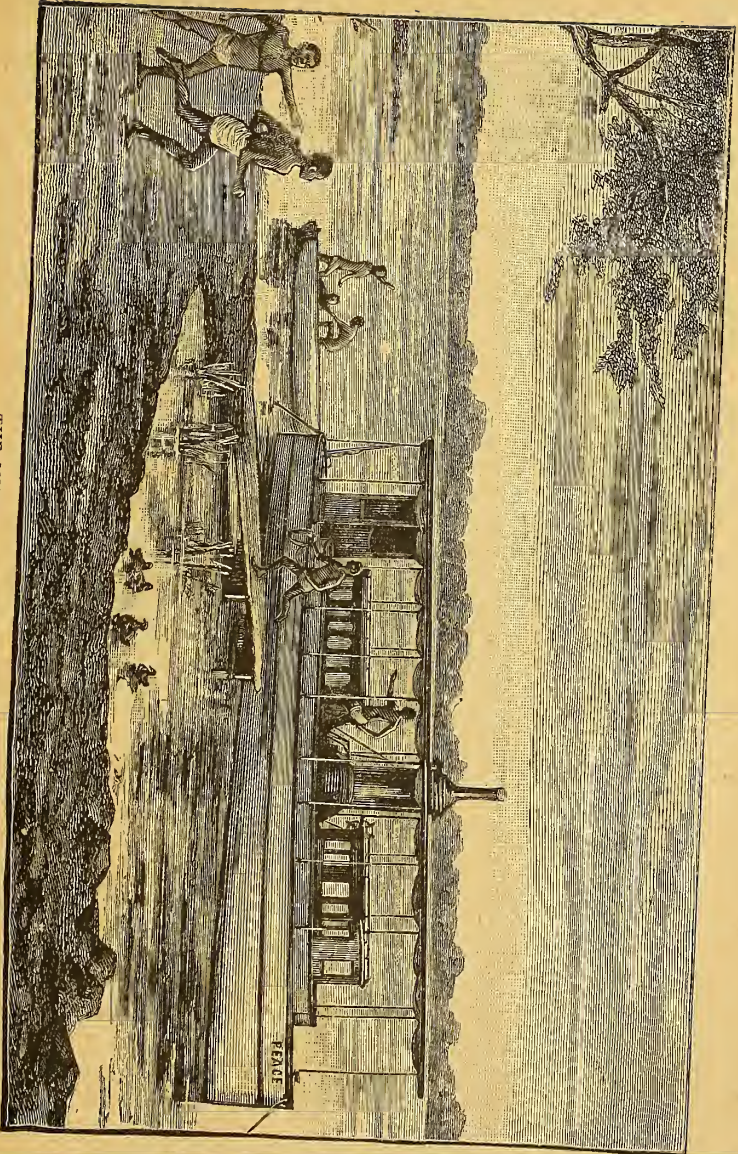
As a further trial, it was found necessary to send

home Mr. Ross in consequence of a partial sunstroke, and this when he was giving great promise of much usefulness, and could ill be spared.

In the following month, however, Mr. Comber was greatly cheered by the arrival at Manyanga of his brother Sidney. He had been kept on the thorns of fidgety expectation for a week or so, and had many a rush to the beach for nothing, until at last he descried a white umbrella in the distance on the south bank; very quickly did he cross the mighty Congo in the *Plymouth*, and, after five years' absence from each other, they met. He was delighted to see him once again, and to find that he was well and scarcely fatigued with his march. "What a lot we had to talk about! This was on the 27th of March. Three days afterwards Stanley came down, and that caused plenty of work, as there were interviews, writing, etc. Then we went for a trip to Ngombe—eight hours away—to see Sid's future sphere, and choose site for building. It is astonishing to me how little Sid has changed in five years. The same manner, expression of face; naturally being older, and having spent four years at the hospital, he bears himself better, and has more ideas, and a stronger individuality, but in many ways he is unchanged, and I am very glad. I most earnestly trust he will make a useful missionary, with his heart *bound up* with his work; if he become absorbed in the life and work he has chosen, he will be contented in and through all."

Ngombe, the station referred to above, was about this time substituted for Manyanga, as it was deemed more suitable, both for convenience of situation and health considerations.

In the same letter in which he described his delight at receiving his brother Sidney, he also referred to the recent losses the Mission had sustained, not only through death, but as well by the return to England of Mr. Whitley and Mr. and Mrs. Crudgington in consequence of sickness. "Do people," he exclaims,



THE MISSION STEAMER PEACE

“fancy we have made a mistake, and the Gospel is not to be preached in Central Africa? Let them take a lesson from the Soudan. When Hicks Pasha and party are cut off, they only send out a bigger pasha and a bigger party. Gordon is coming out, we hear, in Stanley’s place. We want some good men of Gordon’s stamp, fearless and resolute, to whom death is not bitter, and whom trial and difficulty do not daunt. Men with unswerving purpose, who glory in the hard, fast bonds of duty; men to whom the Congo Mission shall be the one thing in life—all-absorbing, all-engrossing, and who will be ready for any phase of its many-sided work. I wish I could stay out here until we had a great story to tell of the power of the Cross of Christ in and over the hearts and lives of men; but this is like the sunrise in our own country—slow and gradual, heralded by a slowly perceptible dawn.”

Mr. Comber was much sustained at this time by the fact of Mr. Bentley having gone to England, knowing, as he did, that he was fully qualified to represent the circumstances and needs of the Mission, as well as to prosecute the literary pursuits which had taken him home—pursuits necessary for the preparation of the Congo Dictionary and Grammar.

We have already referred to the successful launch of the *Peace*. Great was Mr. Comber’s delight when, on his return to Stanley Pool, after settling his brother in the new station of Ngombe, he saw the steamer floating prettily alongside a wharf on the beach. The trial trip at once took place, and with great success; and then, with as little delay as possible, Mr. Comber prepared for the realisation at last of his ardently cherished desire—a long journey on the Upper Congo into the far interior of the “Dark Continent.” It was fitting that the old companion of Cameroons days—Mr. Grenfell—and himself should take this first expedition. They had on board with them one distinguished passenger—Sir Francis de

Winton, K.C.B. Great was their joy to find in Sir Francis a Christian man, "who knelt and sang together with us every evening;" and "who took a very real and sympathetic interest in every phase of our work." This journey occupied, in going and returning, five weeks. It extended as far as Liboko, five hundred miles up the river, about half-way to Stanley Falls. It was accomplished with little difficulty: the steamer was easy of management, the river was perfectly navigable, the people were peaceable, food and fuel were abundant. In relation to future missionary operations the journey was felt to be most important. A considerable knowledge of the country and of the native tribes had been gained; and three sites for mission stations had been selected. After giving a detailed report of this journey to Mr. Baynes, Mr. Comber concluded thus: "Such is the first journey of the *Peace* into countries new and among peoples strange. It was our constant regret that we could not make it more of a missionary journey—that is, in teaching and preaching; but that was impossible, chiefly because we knew so little of the language. We have, however, done a little more preliminary work, which is none the less our 'Father's business.' Oh, for the time when, settling amongst these people, there shall be servants of God, teachers of His Word, to show these heathen the Christian life, and to try to draw them home to God! Oh, will kind friends in England respond? We can but appeal and plead and cry. We can only pray, 'The Lord hasten it in His time.'"

The period had now come when it was in every way desirable that Mr. Comber should be journeying homewards. On going down river, further trouble awaited him. It was his sad lot to witness the death at Manyanga of Mr. Minns, an engineer who had been sent out to assist Mr. Grenfell, as well as to receive the information of the decease of Mr. Craven, of the Livingstone Inland Mis-

sion. His home-coming was naturally delayed by a visit to his sister Carrie at Victoria. Just before quitting Banana he penned the following lines to his old friend and pastor, Dr. Stanford:—

“Although I have many excuses to offer, yet I feel much ashamed at not writing to you for so long a time, especially as you have had sorrow upon sorrow during late years; and if you have sometimes thought of your old boy, ‘Tom Comber,’ you must have thought also that he was neglectful of one of his earliest and best of friends. But I do not think you will judge me too hardly. I can scarcely tell you how difficult letter writing has been to me in this still pioneer stage of the Congo Mission, in its extensive and difficult programme. As the senior of the Mission, very much correspondence with my brethren scattered over Congo Land has fallen upon me. My business correspondence with Congo brethren and with Castle Street finished, I have seldom had time to do more than write a few letters home to my father or brothers, and thus I have seemed very neglectful, I fear, of many old and dear friends.

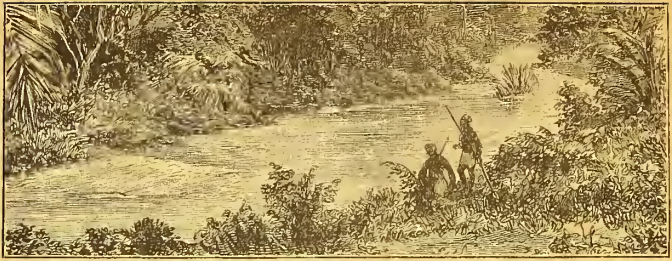
“Believe me, my dear old pastor, I have felt full of sympathy for you time after time, as I have read paragraphs in ‘Freeman’ or ‘Baptist,’ or heard from my father or the Rickards of the afflictions of body from which you have suffered. It grieves me much to think that when I come home, my old friend’s eyes (but not his heart) will be closed to me. I shall miss the look of kindly (and anxious) interest with which you received me upon my return to England six years ago. But I shall know none the less the interest is there, and that you lift up your heart constantly for me, and for such as me, in prayer that we may be kept earnest and true and holy, and that the promises of our gracious God, which you read at my farewell meeting eight years ago, may be fulfilled in me: ‘I

will help thee, saith the Lord and thy Redeemer. Fear not, thou worm Jacob. I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth; thou shalt thresh the mountains and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. . . . I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.'

"Often, too, has my pulse been quickened and my heart thrilled, as was the case in my boyhood when I sat in my pew at Denmark Place, as I have read an address or sermon of yours, and I have almost heard again the same earnest tones and the helpful words, which have refreshed and revived not only me, your old boy and the member of your church, but also my brethren with me.

"The gracious Lord be doubly gracious to you, dear Dr. Stanford, in these your later days, and give you calm joy and holy peace in the afternoon and evening of your life, blessing your words and prayers much to others, to their salvation and sanctification. How often, on the Sundays I have spent in Africa, far from the congregation, from the choir of praise, from the kneeling band of worshippers, in the midst of heathendom, indifferent heathendom often, wretched heathendom always, in loneliness of spirit and solitude of heart, have I wished myself among you at Denmark Place, and have tried to live over again in spirit the old Sundays of my youth! I am almost homeward-bound now, and about the end of February hope once more to see you all. Till then, farewell!"

Before Mr. Comber left Africa he had the satisfaction of knowing that the Mission staff was strengthened by the addition of Messrs. Darling, Cruikshank, Cameron, and M'Millan. He was accompanied on the voyage by his native boys Mantu and Lutunu, and also had under his care Mr. Grenfell's little girl Patty.



CHAPTER XI.

HOME ONCE MORE, AND RETURN TO AFRICA.

“OH! how glad I shall be to see you once more. The time will soon pass away now, and we’ll meet at Euston or some other London terminus, and get a cabby, and try to talk while noisily rattling over the London streets, and if we can’t hear each other, we’ll look at one another. That’ll be a great deal after nearly six years;” thus wrote Mr. Comber to his father. It was in the middle of January, 1885, when his ardent desires for fellowship with dear ones at home were at length gratified. The welcome accorded him, not simply by those of his own more immediate circle, but by “troops of friends,” was most refreshing to his spirit. Many individuals throughout the country had followed his heroic career with prayerful interest, and had deeply felt for him in his great personal sorrow and in the repeated losses which had overtaken the Mission. It was not surprising, therefore, that he should receive numerous assurances, both privately and publicly, of sincere appreciation and of tender sympathy.

He had scarcely, however, been in the home country more than a month, before the gladness of this

reunion was marred by the distressing tidings of his brother Sidney's death. How this terribly sad intelligence was received may be gathered from a letter he prepared for the *Herald*:—"The work of the Congo Mission," he wrote, "has found its way deep down into almost all hearts, and the interest in it has extended very widely to those engaged in it. To very many personally, and to all by name, most of us are known, and I am quite sure that a large number of dear friends will be praying for us by name that in this trial our faith and strength fail not.

"The news of my brother Sidney's death is a terrible blow to us, almost overwhelming, especially to the dear brave girl who was looking forward to spending her life with him in Africa, and to our father. To our sister, too, in Victoria, it will be a dreadful shock; her brothers are all so precious to her. Yesterday we had to break the news to our father. It has, as you can understand, plunged him into deep grief, and yet he cannot and does not regret having given up his children to be missionaries. The thought of the work to which Sidney had given himself, and in which he died, afforded some alleviation to his anguish. But, still, it is very hard to bear. Hitherto, since the death of a little sister twenty-five years ago, we have had no break in my mother's family of one girl and three boys. Twenty years ago our dear mother, after committing us all to the care of our Heavenly Father, was called away home, and we were left to comfort our father. One after another, we have all given ourselves to mission work in Africa—my brother Sidney and I were on the Congo, my sister in Victoria, and Percy, my youngest brother, is preparing at Regent's Park College for the same work. Now has come the first break in this family. . . . Like many other things which have happened in our Congo Mission, we cannot understand it, and we are bewildered. But we know and serve One

who said, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' We have already ventured so far with Him, and trusted so much with Him, 'not knowing' or understanding, and nothing shall shake our confidence in Him. He cannot have made a mistake. He has not 'blundered.' . . . Some of us, had we ten lives, would cheerfully lay them all down at our Master's feet for work in Africa."

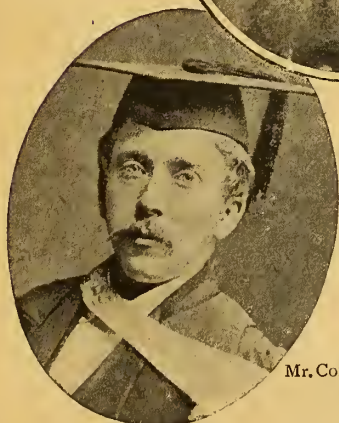
As the time for the annual meeting of the Society approached, it was widely expected that Mr. Comber would be present and speak. This expectation was not disappointed. On the occasion, Exeter Hall was unusually crowded. With a heart weighted by grief on account of the intelligence just arrived, of a further Congo loss, he rose to address the vast and highly sympathetic assembly. He urged the friends of the Mission not to be daunted, inasmuch as they were engaged in a high and holy quest, on which they had been sent by their great King. He trusted there would be no talk of reconsideration, lest they should be accounted unworthy, and be deprived of their great commission. With much effect he quoted the well-known scripture: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And then he proceeded to encourage the patience and faith of his hearers by referring to the early trials and frequent losses, but ultimate success, of the Mission at Accra, as well as by recounting the signs of promise appearing in their own Congo work, especially at San Salvador.

The Royal Geographical Society, of which he was a fellow, was naturally desirous to receive such information as he might be able to impart. He was therefore, a second time honoured with an invitation to address that body, and accordingly read an able and instructive paper relative to the explorations which Mr. Grenfell and he himself had made on the Congo, from Stanley Pool to Mangala, and up the

CARRIE COMBER.



THOMAS J. COMBER.



Mr. COMBER, Sen.



SIDNEY COMBER.

PERCY COMBER.

FIVE PORTRAITS OF THE COMBER FAMILY.

Bochini to the junction of the Kwango. Several distinguished members of the Society were present, amongst them being: Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Frederic Goldsmid, Sir Erasmus Ommanney, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Delmar Morgan, the last of whom had met Mr. Comber at Stanley Pool, and had accompanied him on a visit to the great chief Nga Liema. Mr. Guinness of the Livingstone Mission was also present. The paper was adjudged to be of great geographical value. In proposing a vote of thanks, the chairman expressed his regret at the unavoidable absence of Mr. Stanley. It was hoped he would have attended, but the date was inconvenient.

A public opportunity for Mr. Comber and Mr. Stanley to meet was, however, near at hand. On the 28th of May, the celebrated African traveller was invited by the Missionary Society to a breakfast at the Cannon Street Hotel. On this memorable occasion, the chair was occupied by Mr. Joseph Tritton, the then treasurer, who welcomed Mr. Stanley in terms he so well knew how to use, of excellent propriety and chaste beauty. Mr. Comber made honourable mention of his frequent personal intercourse with their guest; of their talks together about Livingstone, and the needs and future of Africa. He told an amusing story, how that one morning visiting Mr. Stanley early at Leopoldville, on a matter of business, and with a somewhat neglected toilet, instead of saying, "Why, Mr. Comber, you haven't shaved lately," he began talking about Dr. Livingstone, and remarked how particular and careful the doctor always was as to his personal appearance in Central Africa, never allowing a day to pass, for instance, without shaving. Of course, observed Mr. Comber, I understood the allusion and remembered Mr. Stanley's kindly hint afterwards. During his speech, Mr. Comber again and again gratefully recognised the kind help shown, not only to his own Mission, but to those of other societies.

After the presentation of an engraved address, Mr. Stanley responded, bearing in the course of a characteristic address, most generous but just testimony to the labours of Mr. Comber and of other Christian missionaries.

During his sojourn at home, Mr. Comber wrote, at the request of the Committee, a manual of a hundred pages for the use of missionaries to the Congo, containing, as the outcome of his own experience, most important directions, hints and warnings. Two other manuals appeared at the same time, one written by Dr. Frederic Roberts, and the other by Dr. Prosser James, the latter taking the form of familiar letters addressed to Mr. Comber, and to which Mr. Comber himself wrote an introduction.

And so the few months to be spent in the old country passed busily and rapidly away. The necessities of the work in Africa, and the departure of several new missionaries, whom it was desirable he should accompany, brought his furlough to an end in the month of August. A few days before he left, he wrote to his esteemed friend, Mr. Parkinson: "Notwithstanding the driving work and anxiety since my return, I seem to have drunk to the full the pleasures of knowing what dear friends I have, and yet whom I seem to have seen so little. The knowledge of affectionate regard and sympathy, so much greater than I am worthy of, will cheer, console and nerve me, but will make me long to see you all again. I shall have many tinglings of pleasure-pain from mingled reflections. But what is before me, I know not. So long as our Father guides my steps, I fear nothing. I want it to be 'for me to live, Christ,' always and in everything. I sometimes wonder whether this will be my *last* visit to England."

A deeply interesting valedictory service was held in Camden Road Chapel, an address being delivered by the Rev. S. H. Booth, which was followed by another meeting of the same character at Liverpool on the

evening before the embarkation. Numerous friends were on the quay to bid the missionaries an enthusiastic 'God-speed.'

"Oh, many a ship, on Mersey's tide,
Sailed forth that August day,
With richly-laden merchandise
For regions far away ;
But none did bear so rich a freight,
Methinks the angels say,
As that which bore our noble band
To Congo's 'shining way.'

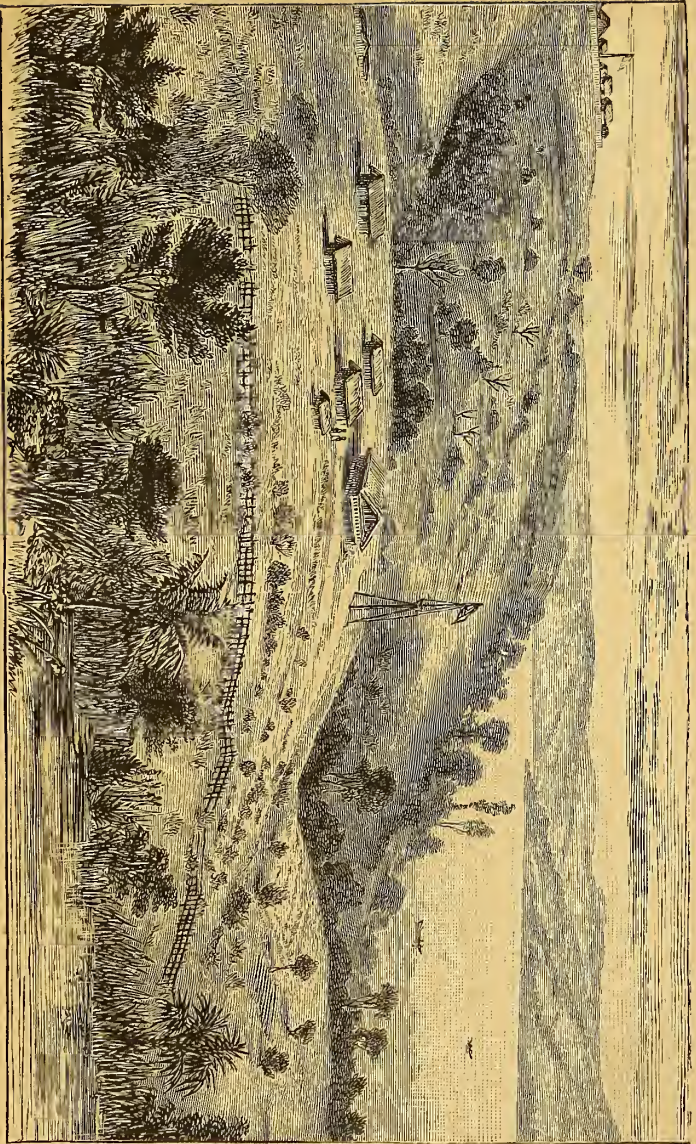
"And as our fond 'Good-byes' were merged
In that soul-stirring hymn,
'Stand up for Jesus,' which we sang,
Though eyes were growing dim,
Methought that angels might have wished
To come within our view,
And leave their golden harps to sing
'Stand up for Jesus,' too !

"And how we cheered ! with heart and voice
We made the welkin ring !
Well might we cheer those brave young hearts,
Leal servants of our King !
We trust our song and cheer that day,
Like seed on wings of air,
Will reach the wastes of Congo Land,
And grow and blossom there."

The band of new missionaries, much to Mr. Comber's great and thankful joy, included his brother Percy. The other four being Messrs. Biggs, Davies, Maynard, and Richards. How sorely these reinforcements were needed may be gathered from the fact that of the three brethren who a few months before had preceded them, two, Messrs. Cowe and Cottingham, had succumbed to fever, Mr. Charters alone remaining. The intelligence had also arrived of the decease of Mr. Cruickshank.

In his hurry, Mr. Comber had forgotten before leaving to thank his old pastor and friend, Dr. Stanford, for two books he had sent him, and so, on the

MANYANGA, OR WATHEN STATION, CONGO RIVER.



S.S. *Lualaba*, he wrote his grateful acknowledgments, —“Thank you very much for them. Your books always do me good. I came home very hungry spiritually, and wish I could have had more feeding and ruminating. I have, however, ‘the Bread of Life,’ and trust that ‘evermore He will give me this Bread.’ I seem to have so little time for meditation and self-examination, but trust I shall have more ‘before I go hence,’ which, I hope, will be a long while ahead (although, of course, I am ready at any time He sees fit).”

On the voyage out, the *Lualaba* called at Victoria, thus affording a most welcome opportunity for the two brothers to see their sister Carrie, and make the acquaintance of their new missionary brother-in-law, Mr. Hay, to whom she had recently been married. Arrangements, much to Mr. Comber’s delight, had been made for Mr. and Mrs. Hay to go down on the *Lualaba* as far as the Gaboon, thus giving four or five days’ instead of a few hours’ fellowship.

On the 9th of October, Mr. Comber had reached Underhill (Tunduwa), the party having all arrived at Banana in capital health and spirits. His desire and hope now were that he might be permitted to settle quietly down to the best sort of work; he felt that hitherto he had had so much precarious, uncertain work to do, here, there, and everywhere, breaking up the fallow ground. From Underhill he proceeded to Bayneston, and thence to Wathen and the Pool, taking with him, as far as circumstances permitted, the new men to their respective stations, and intending to come down again to be with his brother Percy at Wathen, where he hoped to enter upon the quiet settled work he so much desired. But almost immediately after his return, most distressing news reached him, being nothing less than the news of the death of Mrs. Hay at Victoria. Knowing how terribly his father especially would feel this fresh sorrow, he wrote a letter full of tenderest sympathy, in which he expressed

his ardent wish that they might have been together at such a time, as they were when they heard of Sydney's death. Duty however to the Master had caused the separation, and he trusted they might not murmur. He was glad and thankful to be able to assure his father that he had realised much of the Saviour's help and comfort. Very pathetically he wrote,—“I seem to be getting so used to trouble and loss. I suppose I'm only a young man yet, but I have found this world full of sorrow. My dear mother and sister in early life, my darling Minnie, my dear little pet 'Pussie,' with her little sister Muriel, then dear old Sid, and now my brave missionary sister, Carrie. These, besides other losses, which naturally have not touched me so nearly. So many of our treasures being gathered up and taken care of for us in the heavenly kingdom. Never mind, dear father! we will learn the lesson that the worries and difficulties, troubles and sorrows, of this world are bringing us nearer to the blessedness of the sorrowless life; and not only bringing us nearer, but making us more meet for heaven, I trust.”

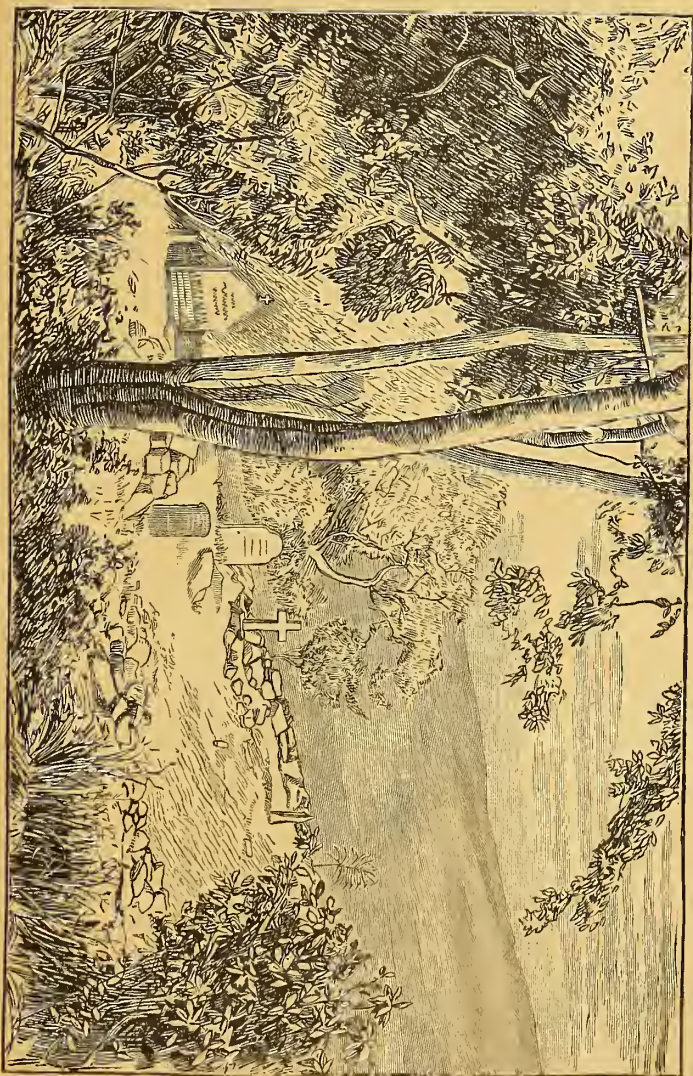
Being enabled to bear so nobly this new sorrow, Mr. Comber might have proceeded quietly as he desired with his work at Wathen, had it not been for the exigencies of the mission. At the end of January he dates from Underhill, where he had arrived just in time to treat Mr. Maynard who was suffering from his first attack of fever, but alas, not successfully. Mr. Weeks was now nearly due at Banana, with Mrs. Weeks, Messrs. Scrivener and Silvey, and also Miss Pitt to be married to Mr. Maynard. Anxious that the news of John Maynard's death should be broken as gently as possible to Miss Pitt, he hastened to Banana that he might be there on her arrival. Mr. and Mrs. Weeks and Mr. Silvey being bound for San Salvador, Mr. Comber felt it wise that he should accompany them, being very deeply concerned that the journey should not be taken too hastily. This

particular visit to San Salvador was especially refreshing to the sorely tried heart of the hard-working missionary, for he found the work most prosperous. He was delighted to see no less than fifty-seven boys in the school, many of whom had come a long distance on the road to meet him and his companions, and was most of all cheered by the fidelity of his old friends, feeling assured they were "not far from the kingdom." The day of the week on which he arrived was Saturday, and so on the following day he was able to conduct the Sunday services. On the morning of Monday, with inexpressible joy, he conducted the first Congo baptism in the presence of a large number of the people, the candidate being his boy, Mantu. The date of this important event, so full of promise to the Congo Mission, was the 29th of March, the year being 1886.

Towards the end of May Mr. Comber was again at Wathen, which he now fully hoped would be his Congo home, and it seemed as if this hope might be realised. For several months he was able to pursue his labours without any interruption: no tidings coming to disturb him except those which announced the calamity by fire at the Pool station. But that disaster, being remediable, he felt sure friends at home would soon repair—a confidence most splendidly justified by their abounding liberality. Writing to Mr. Tritton, the Treasurer, on the 27th of September, he was able to rejoice that for eight months his fellow-missionaries—eighteen in number—had been preserved; and that during the previous eight months, with only one exception, the same immunity from loss had been enjoyed. The mission at Wathen had now become thoroughly established. Twenty-five boys had been induced to come and live with him. His medical work was telling, and the people were willing and wanting to hear the Gospel.

At the date of this communication, Mr. Bentley,

MISSION BURIAL GROUND AT UNDERHILL, CONGO RIVER.



with further reinforcements—Messrs. Darby, Graham, Philips, and Shindler—arrived at Banana.

There came, however, an interruption to his work at Wathen, but it was in a manner which brought Mr. Comber no sadness, but only joy. It was in the form of an earnest request from the brethren in charge of the work at San Salvador, to come to their guidance and help in the religious awakening which at last was cheering and encouraging the mission. To this call he at once responded, visiting on his way Mbanza Manteka, the station of the American Baptist Missionary Union, formerly of the Livingstone Mission, where a similar blessing was being enjoyed. On reaching San Salvador, he found that the influence of the Spirit of God upon the hearts and lives of the people was most evident, large numbers of the natives crowding to hear the preaching, many giving in their names as inquirers, fifty of whom Mr. Comber thought were sincerely desirous to be Christians. Particularly grateful was he to find that the most definite idea in their minds was the necessity of giving up sin and living pure, truthful, and righteous lives. After remaining a fortnight with the brethren, he left San Salvador for his own station, Wathen. At Underhill he wrote to Mrs. Hartland, under date of March the 7th, giving a most encouraging account of what he had seen. "The work is clearly that of our God; and He Himself is touching the hearts of the people. Silvey, Cameron, Philips, and Graham, had a week of special services, which were signally blessed. Hundreds attended them nightly. And now, three months after, when the novelty has worn off, the Sunday or week evening meetings are always as well attended as during that special week, 300 to 350 at ordinary meetings, and about 200 at inquirers' meetings. The regularity is astonishing; and religion with many is, in some degree or other, a matter of *concern*, with some, the chief concern. Many have come wanting to make

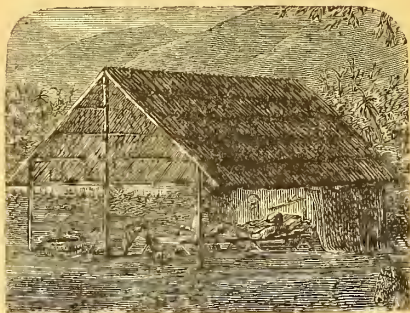
a profession—*i.e.*, to have their names down, who have not thought why they want it. This of course was to be expected. As, with many, this name-entering gave a wrong impression, we are now more reserved, and only enter those who appear to understand and to mean what they say, sending the rest away after a little talk and prayer with them, and encouraging them to come again. Perhaps 50 out of the 200 really desire to follow Christ and are more or less earnest; and of these 50, it may be 12 or 20 have given themselves to Christ and taken Him as their Saviour and Master—although there is still much need for instruction, for they have not listened to God's truth in the past as they listen now. We feel it necessary, however, to let the life confirm the lip before baptising. Our brightest and best and most satisfactory are Matoka and D. Miguel. The king's wives, many of them, seem sincere inquirers; many young men appear to be strongly decided to live the Christian life; and, as you may expect, many of our boys—among them, Malevo, Kavungu, Kivitidi, and Matata. With many of these—all the special ones—I have had careful talks, and feel satisfied. Oh! San Salvador *is* changed! To speak at those meetings was glorious, and filled me with joy and hope for our Congo Mission. As to the poor old king, the priests frighten, threaten, bribe, flatter, and seem to have their way with him almost entirely. He has taken to a little mild persecution, which of course *does good*. Yes, poor Don Pedro has greatly changed. We are praying especially for him you may be sure."

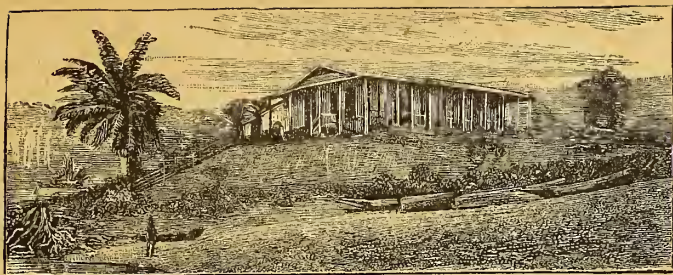
Immediately after the date of this letter, Mr. Comber intended to start with Mr. and Mrs. Moolenaar for Wathen, but was detained at Underhill on account of Mr. Darling's health. Mr. Shindler, too, the other missionary in charge, became ill, and, to his inexpressible grief, all that Mr. Comber could do failed to preserve their precious lives; and three weeks later his trials were further

increased by tidings from the Pool of Miss Spearing's death.

On the 26th of April, Mr. Comber was at Banana, to place Mrs. Darling on board the steamer which would convey her back to England. The following day he wrote to his father:—"As the *Portuguese* is just in, I'm going to take a sea-trip for eighteen days—to Mossamedes—towards the Cape, returning in same steamer. I'm a little run down bodily and mentally, and need this little rest. . . . What has happened has much unhinged me. The 19th of March, 1887, is a sad day in my calendar, already full enough of sad entries. It is all so perplexing, and one knows not what to say. God is over all, and does all wisely and lovingly. This we know."

After this sea-trip he returned to Underhill, but was little benefited by the change.





CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

IT may be said, and said, perhaps truly, that a life so weighted with anxious responsibility, involving so continuous a strain, both physically and mentally, as that which Mr. Comber lived—and lived in an African clime, was morally certain to come to an early close. It may, however, be equally true that there are certain positions in God's kingdom which admit of only a few years' service, as men count years; and which none but the worthiest can fill. The figures on a dial plate, the anniversaries of a birthday, have no relevancy in calculating the value of life—are useless to indicate its real worth. In the truest estimate of earthly service the element of duration has no essential place. Therefore, let the reader pause and consider, lest he too hastily pronounce the end of the noble life sketched in these pages to have been "untimely." How true it is that some men live much in a brief space; whilst others live little though they exceed the three-score years and ten!

The story of the closing days is soon told. From the unnerving effect of the recent losses, Mr. Comber

never recovered; and so, when fever came, he could not meet it with the former power of resistance. On the 16th of June he was dangerously ill; the remittent fever being complicated with severe hæmaturia and sleeplessness. Mr. Scrivener, the missionary in charge of the Underhill station, had the great advantage of Dr. Small's assistance, a medical missionary belonging to the American Baptist Missionary Union; but the hæmaturia continued, greatly weakening the patient. The doctor advised a trip to sea as the only chance of saving his life. Lieutenant Valcke, the President of the Executive Board of the Free State, placed the *Prince Bodouin* at the disposal of the Mission; and Mr. Comber was comfortably conveyed from Underhill to Banana. Every attention was shown the sick missionary. A German steamer, the *Lulu Bohlen*, homeward bound, came into the creek, and Mr. Comber was carried on board. The captain, ship doctor, and others, were unremitting in their kindness. At first the sea breezes were beneficial, but the benefit was only temporary; strength gradually failed, and on the 27th of June, 1887, the end came peacefully whilst the vessel lay anchored off Loango.

"Our brother," reported Mr. Scrivener, who never left him, "seemed to have a strong presentiment that he would not recover. During the night we passed at Boma, he called me to his side, and said he had been reasoning the matter over in his mind. He did not think he should recover; but whether he recovered or not, the Father's will was best. He considered his ties—that of sonship—his dear father: and then his brother Percy would be the only son left if he died. His father had given up three boys for the Congo Mission. He (Mr. Comber) had the sweetest prospects for the future; there was much that made him feel that he would like to stay, but the Father's will was best. Both Dr. Small and myself assured him of our belief that the sea breezes would strengthen him, and

that he would live to do many more years work in Congo. We said we could not spare him yet, and he must hope for continued life and usefulness. He replied he did not want to die ; he would like to live a long, long time. His experience was perhaps useful to the Mission ; but, he said, we must not look at the matter in that way. What was the Father's will ? That must be our first consideration. He then dropped off to sleep, and the next morning was much better. During his sleep he repeated three lines of a hymn as follows :—

“O Christ, Thou art the Fountain,
The deep well-spring of love,
The springs of earth I've tasted—

I did not catch the last line ; I took notes of my brother's words at once.”

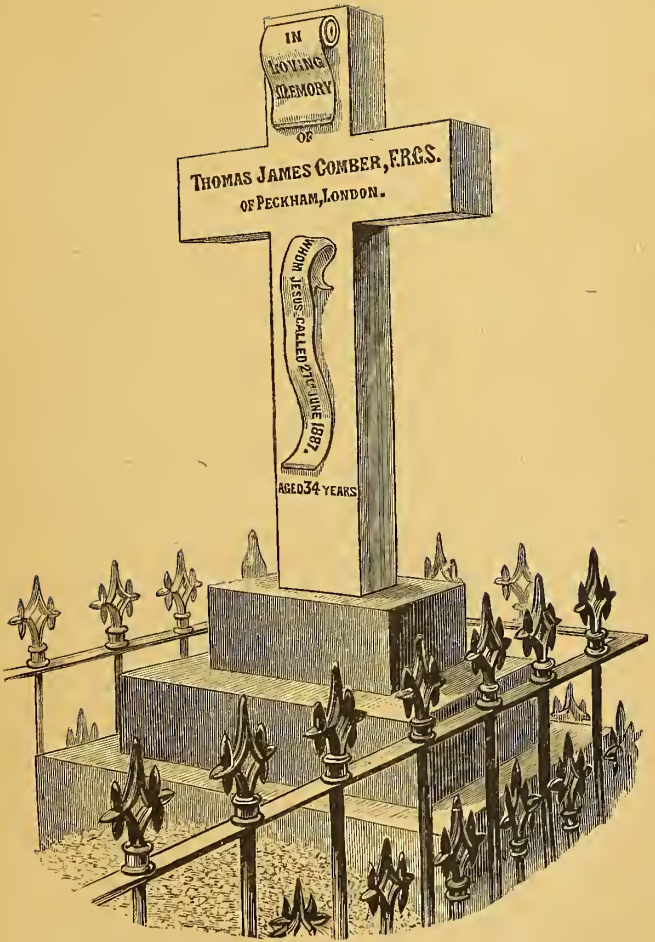
Such was the esteem in which Mr. Comber was held, that the captain kindly ran his vessel into the Mayumba Bay, some two hundred miles north of the Congo River, thus giving opportunity for burial on shore. Mr. Scrivener conducted a short service ; the captain, doctor, and many of the crew and passengers being present to express their sincere esteem and sorrow.

When the distressing news reached this country, many hearts beside those of his relatives were bowed down with grief. “Not only does this blow fall on us,” wrote Mr. Grenfell, his intimate colleague of ten years, “who have lost a loving-hearted friend, and devoted fellow-worker, who was ever ready to sacrifice himself, and whose charity never failed, but you will remember, as I do, the heaviness and bitterness that this stroke will bring to the hearts of dear relatives, and a wide circle of very affectionate friends.”

At their next monthly meeting, the Committee of the Society sorrowfully recorded their keen sense of the heavy loss the Mission had sustained. “The Committee,” we quote from the official minutes,

“feel it impossible to over-estimate the loss the Congo Mission has sustained by the death of their dear brother, Mr. Comber. Associated with the Congo enterprise from its very commencement, all through its course he has been one of its most beloved and trusted leaders. His brave yet gentle spirit drew towards him the affection and confidence of all with whom he was brought into contact, while his calm, resourceful nature made him ever wise, courageous, and hopeful in seasons of special danger and difficulty.”

To his numerous friends of Camden Road Chapel a memorial sermon, marked by beautiful appreciation of his worth, and full of comforting and inspiring sentiments, was preached by the pastor, the Rev. George Hawker. The preacher selected for his text the words of Paul: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.” In the course of his sermon he observed: “God’s hand was on Thomas Comber, a man conscious of a mission in the nineteenth century, whom I dare to associate this evening, in reverent thought, with his great prototype. Those who knew Mr. Comber, and followed his career, cannot fail to have recognised his many Pauline characteristics, and the apostolic elevation of life to which he attained. They will be interested to recall that conspicuous among the books that influenced him as a boy, colouring his dreams, and filling his mind with ardent veneration, was one entitled, ‘The Footsteps of St. Paul.’” Space will not permit more than one further quotation. Referring to Mr. Comber’s leadership in the Mission, Mr. Hawker justly observes:—“His experience, his administrative ability, his practical wisdom, his unmeasured kindness, made him indispensable upon all occasions of difficulty or trouble; and though he assumed no official superiority, and made little of his



TOMB OF T. J. COMBER.

splendid services, the confidence and respect of friends at home, and colleagues in the field, constituted him a leader, and imposed upon him the surely accompanying load of care."

A few weeks after the delivery of this memorial sermon at Camden Road Chapel, his earlier friends at Denmark Place expressed their affectionate esteem by erecting a tablet, which was most appropriately unveiled by Mr. Edward Rawlings, he, having been superintendent of the Sunday school, when Tom Comber was a scholar.

"Wherever your Comber went, there was life and activity. Again and again as I looked at him, he reminded me of the young man with the banner, on which was the word 'Excelsior';" so testified Mr. Stanley to Mr. Charters, a fellow-missionary.

By his native name VIANGA-VIANGA, a sobriquet applied to a person who always hurries about—a ubiquitous person, he will long be remembered.

In a recent letter from Mr. Slade, one of the Congo missionaries, the following testimony occurs:—"We at Wathen are only beginning to realise the great, almost irreparable loss we sustained by the death of Thomas Comber. His genial, hearty manner with the natives, always making himself at home with them in their houses, or by their camp-fires, gave him a hold upon them which it is not easy for every man to acquire. I frequently hear him spoken of with true affection, and it will be a long time before his memory dies in the hearts of those who loved him but little less than we ourselves. That God should call home such men as he, when the realisation of their long-cherished hopes and constant prayers were so near, is to me incomprehensible. It is for us, however, not to question His decrees, but to accept them in the spirit of true resignation, and to say, with a complete surrender of our own will, 'God knoweth best!'"

But far surpassing in worth every other memorial is

Affectionate Remembrance
— OF —

THOMAS JAMES COMBER, F.R.G.S.

IN EARLY LIFE A SCHOLAR AND TEACHER

IN THIS SUNDAY SCHOOL,

WHERE HE FORMED THE RESOLVE TO CONSECRATE
HIS LIFE AS A MISSIONARY TO AFRICA.

HE BECAME THE PIONEER AND LEADER OF THE
BAPTIST MISSION ON THE CONGO.

AND FOR ELEVEN YEARS DEVOTEDLY LABOURED
AMID MANY PERILS SUSTAINED BY FAITH IN GOD,
AND ARDENT LOVE TO CHRIST;

TILL CALLED TO HIS REWARD 27TH JUNE 1887.

AGED 34 YEARS.

THIS TABLET IS ERECTED BY
OLD COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS.

MEMORIAL TABLET IN THE SCHOOLROOM OF DENMARK PLACE
BAPTIST CHAPEL.

the tribute of gratitude and affection paid by redeemed Africans.

“I am very, very sorry to hear that my dear master is dead, and to hear that you did not see him before he died. Oh dear! when I think of him, it make me very grieved, how kind he had been to me, kind as a father would be to his sons and to everybody. He left his beautiful home and all his friends in England, and came out to our bad country for our sake, to help us to love and serve our Saviour, Jesus. I cannot tell you what sorrow I feel when I think I no longer hear my dear master’s voice on earth, though I know he is gone to Heaven. God want him in Heaven. I must close this now. My God will comfort your heart.” So wrote Mantu, the first Christian convert in Congo, to Mr. Percy Comber.

Since Mr. Comber baptised Mantu, a Christian Church has been formed at San Salvador; Matoko, Don Miguel, his earliest friends, are now, with others, rejoicing in that Saviour’s love, of which the missionary was the first to tell them. And from that Church is going forth the Light into the surrounding darkness. “We have sat in conference among ourselves,” report these native Christians, “and we have sent one man to go and preach the good news of Jesus Christ in the towns that are near us; from the church he goes out, others also go out into the towns on the Lord’s day; we wish all the people in our country to know our Saviour, who came to die for us. We have a hope that before this year is ended, many people will come and join themselves to our Church by the help of God. Truly the work here is making progress; there are many things, we drink them in sorrow, but we know that God listens to our prayer, and is very near to us always, therefore we cannot see fear. Now, our brethren, we pray you (the friends to whom this communication was sent) to remember us in your prayers. We also shall not forget you. If here on earth we shall not see one another, there is

no matter; we shall see one another in another country, where (dwelleth) our Lord Jesus Christ, when we shall not be separated again. Now we have finished."

In the following strains mused one, who, like Mr. Comber himself, had been a messenger of the "Glad Tidings" to dark, degraded Africa:—

ANOTHER FALLEN. *

Another fallen! Nay, say not so,
That our brother fell,
When the fever reached its fiercest height,
And Heaven gleamed near through the gathering night;
And he heard,—ah, who can tell
What rapturous songs of rejoicing love,
And a whispered welcome to home above,
Which told him all was well!

Another risen! were better said;
For Heaven came near,
And no meteor's flight in that quivering sky
Was brighter than this as he sped on high
With a song from this lower sphere;
And we knew that a heart beat fast in Heaven,
With the gentle thrill of a bliss new-given,
For the heart that was still down here.

Another risen! I stand in thought,
With barèd brow,
Where that grave looks up to the sullen sky,
And the grey sea sobs its dirge near by,
And I ask, Hath he left us now?
Has the fire died out from that eager breast?
Yet untired by work does he idly rest,
While millions their need avow?

Have risen spirits less love than when
They toiled below?
Does that brighter world, with its wealth of bliss,
Quench thought of the want and woe of this?

* This phrase was Mr. Comber's own, used in reference to his brother's death.

Or, do they in Heaven know
The suasion of love such as we ne'er feel?
With a wider hope and a warmer zeal,
To which we can but grow.

Ah, yes ! they have more of love than we,
And less of fear ;
They have more of pity for every plaint,
And none of the feeble frame's restraint,
Which limits action here ;
Then why should we weep for him as lost
Who the bounds of this little life hath crossed
For work in a freer sphere ?

He serves Him still whose work is ours,
And, while earth hath woe,
God hath work for all, and most for those
Who have entered the calm of the soul's repose,
From the struggle and pain below ;
And we must believe that 'tis best that he
Should serve in a higher grade than we.
Since God has willed it so.

THE END.

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